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Fifty-second Session

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New York

President: Mr. Udovenko ..... (Ukraine)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

The President: The Assembly will first hear an address by the chairman of the delegation of Estonia, His Excellency Mr. Trivimi Velliste.

Mr. Velliste (Estonia): Mr. President, first of all I would like to congratulate you on your election as President of the General Assembly at this session. We wish you success in this responsible task in a year that will be of great importance for the Organization.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the previous President of the Assembly, Ambassador Ismail, who showed exceptional commitment to the reform initiatives throughout the fifty-first session. That recently concluded session was an important step towards a reinforced United Nations which, with its universal membership, will have to be able to deal with serious problems facing the world today.

We expect the fifty-second session of the General Assembly to be a decisive landmark in the renewal and restructuring of the United Nations — a major endeavour undertaken by Member States several years ago. In this respect we would like to pay tribute to the Secretary-General, who presented his report on this question to the General Assembly on 16 July. My Government lends its full support to Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his efforts. We also note with satisfaction that part of this package has already been implemented.

Estonia is looking forward to an agreement within the foreseeable future concerning a response by Member States to the Secretary-General's proposals. It is our sincere hope that Members will deal with this matter in a constructive manner and that a generally acceptable scheme for reforming the United Nations will be agreed upon. We are confident that all Member States will benefit from the reform of the Organization.

I would now like to focus my address on points of specific relevance to present needs in the reform package. The aim of reform as a whole is to adapt the Organization to its new challenges, to make it more effective and efficient, more manageable and modern in every way. We are now remodelling this Organization to make it compatible with the twenty-first century. The world has changed — the United Nations has to change with it. Having criteria for the appraisal of performance seems to be of crucial importance. Result-based budgeting should assure a strengthened linkage between intergovernmental mandates and their efficient implementation. Enhanced cost effectiveness envisaged for 1998-1999 is also an encouraging sign.

Estonia lends strong support to the idea of cutting the number of agenda items for future sessions. We also find the idea of consolidating the representation of different United Nations funds and programmes in

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Member States on common premises and under one flag to be very attractive. United Nations Houses would enhance the visibility of the Organization and provide a valuable source of information about it and its activities. I would like to note the positive experience Estonia has gathered in cooperation with the local United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) country office. Many programmes vital to Estonia have materialized owing to the support of the UNDP. We highly appreciate this cooperation and hope that the future United Nations House will be able to use that valuable expertise.

The financing of the United Nations is a question that interests all of us. Without adequate financing, the Organization would not be able to fulfil its mandate. This fifty-second session of the General Assembly must assess the impact of the Secretary-General's proposed reforms on the programme budget for 1998-1999 and define a new scale of assessments for its Member States. Estonia supports the Secretary-General's reform measures aimed at enhancing the Organization's effectiveness and better implementation of its programmes by reducing excessive and unnecessary expenditures.

With regard to the new scale of assessments, Estonia would like to see a more transparent scale based on the fundamental principle of capacity to pay to be adopted. All measures should lead towards putting the Organization on a sound and predictable financial footing. We believe that the main prerequisite for achieving this goal is that Member States clear their arrears to the regular as well as to the peacekeeping budgets. Estonia is committed to doing so.

We welcome the appointment of Mrs. Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland, to the position of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Estonia supports the plan for the consolidation of the Centre for Human Rights and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights into one office. We would also like to stress the importance that we attach to adequate financing of the Organization's human rights machinery.

Two major events have occurred in the past year in the field of economic and social cooperation. The first of them was the adoption of the Agenda for Development. Estonia shares the perception of the importance of development issues for the United Nations. Health and education should also be high priorities. The second such event was the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, the aim of which was to review the implementation of Agenda 21, the global plan of action for sustainable development adopted in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Although the special session acknowledged the positive results which have been achieved since Rio, it also expressed concern over worsened overall trends for sustainable development. In this regard, we expect the fifty-second session of the General Assembly to give further political impetus to the implementation of the mandates and tasks defined at the session.

In Estonia, we believe that our task today is to provide the present generation with the safe, good-quality living environment and resources needed to promote a strong and diversified economy without compromising the needs of future generations. For that reason, over the last five years Estonia has signed, ratified and acceded to more than 40 bilateral and multilateral environment agreements and conventions. We have also established the Governmental Commission on Sustainable Development, led by the Prime Minister. Estonia is working closely with the countries in the Baltic Sea area to develop a Baltic region sustainable development strategy.

I would like to stress the importance that we attach to the consideration of economic and social issues by the General Assembly. With this in view, the work of the Second and Third Main Committees should be rationalized in order to avoid any overlap and duplication.

One of the central areas of the reform concerns renewing the Security Council. This year, Member States must continue efforts to achieve the goal of making the Council more representative and to improve its working methods. Estonia elaborated its position in cooperation with a group of smaller like-minded countries. We support enlargement in both existing categories. We also view Germany and Japan as potential new permanent members of the Council. The developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America should also be represented on a permanent basis.

Disarmament has been one of the United Nations priority goals since its founding. In fact, disarmament efforts have yielded considerable progress. The conclusion of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty last year was an important step forward.

One of the important responsibilities of the United Nations is managing conflicts — acting rapidly in the face of crises. Peacekeeping continues to be an important activity of the Organization. In recent years, we have

been witnessing a change in the role of United Nations peacekeeping missions. United Nations peacekeepers have been facing the challenge of dealing with internal conflicts throughout the world.

Estonia is continuing to take part in United Nations peacekeeping. An Estonian company has recently completed its successful deployment in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Together with Latvia and Lithuania, we are looking forward to contributing a battalion of peacekeepers to the United Nations peacekeeping operations. The battalion, called BALTBAT, will be operational from the beginning of 1998. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all Member States of the Organization that have been participating in this project. The initial experience of Baltic peacekeepers in United Nations peacekeeping missions has shown how regional cooperation evolves into global cooperation. The Baltic preparedness to merge as a joint battalion is an element strengthening regional security. It proves our readiness to assume responsibility as well as our right to choose our own means of security. Estonia is currently contributing civilian police officers and military observers. We have also joined the United Nations peacekeeping standby arrangement.

We strongly believe in the cooperation of the United Nations with regional organizations in all parts of the world. Reliance on the expertise and capacities of these organizations would allow us to avoid duplication and allocate scarce resources in the most effective manner. We do have examples of fruitful cooperation with regional entities. In Europe, we have been witnessing joint United Nations actions, in particular with the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) in Europe and with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

We would like to note that the structure and composition of regional organizations is changing. The European Union and NATO are gradually opening to new members. This is a very important phenomenon in the process towards enhancing stability and security in our region. Estonia associates its future with full membership in both of these organizations.

In conclusion, let me express my sincere hope that on the eve of the twenty-first century mankind is willing to reverse its classical interpretation of the past so eloquently expressed at the dawn of this century by the English novelist and poet Thomas Hardy:

> "War makes rattling good history; but Peace is poor reading." [Thomas Hardy, *The Dynasts*, pt. II, *Spirit Sinister*]

The President: The next speaker is the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and National Security and Attorney-General of Belize, His Excellency the Honourable Dean Barrow.

Mr. Barrow (Belize): Permit me first to offer you, Sir, the congratulations of Belize's delegation on your election, and the assurance of our fullest cooperation as you follow through on the accomplishments of your distinguished predecessor, Mr. Razali Ismail of Malaysia.

As the world shifts gears towards a preoccupation with what could be described as millennium fever, our annual stocktaking exercise becomes particularly poignant. And if truth be told, the record of our success — measured against the historical vision of the founders and against current challenges — is not an unsullied one. Nevertheless, in every sphere of human endeavour, in every tangible advance of international comity, the signature of the United Nations can be found. We have contributed to fundamental changes for good in the fabric of the global community. Of course, and as is always the case with less than perfect man-made enterprises, our job is far from done.

As the Secretary-General noted in his report on the work of the Organization, we live in an era of realignment. Belize shares his view that this Organization has to continue adjusting to the changes which envelop today's world, so as to maintain the balance in favour of a more secure and predictable peace, greater economic well-being, social justice and environmental sustainability.

Despite sea changes in the international climate, the relevance of the original objectives of the Organization's Charter remains acute. There is still need to respond rapidly to threats to international peace and security. Economic and social development must be further advanced. Human rights, the rule of law and the ideals of democratic, accountable governance must be concretized in our daily life. And the changes, such as globalization and reshaping of the United Nations environment must strengthen the commitment of nations large and small to international cooperation. The one fundamental lesson that the experience of the last 52 years has taught is that we cannot go it alone. There is large benefit to be derived from multilateralism; and to our mind the United

Nations is the one organization with the wherewithal and capacity to take global action on a global agenda.

We have been promised that the renewed United Nations system sought by the Secretary-General will become both more effective and more efficient. The extensive and far-reaching set of changes proposed in his Programme for Reform are said to be designed to achieve greater unity of purpose, coherence of effort and flexibility in response. Belize therefore joins with those voices applauding the attempt to strengthen and streamline the United Nations and enhance its institutional capacity. My delegation will eagerly await opportunities to hear comment and will participate in joint analysis of the proposed Programme for Reform.

One major hindrance to the Organization's capacity is its dire financial situation. We have noted proposals within the Secretary-General's Programme for Reform designed to ensure a viable financial basis for the Organization. It is my delegation's view, however, that there is still a need for greater clarification if financial solvency is to be assured. We are not entirely convinced that the creation of the proposed Revolving Credit Fund will alleviate the situation. We would rather see implementation of measures for harsher censure in cases of tardiness in meeting obligations. Let us again state our view that this Organization should be granted some measure of autonomy in generating revenue from sources outside national Administrations.

There is an ongoing parallel at the national and organizational level aimed at economizing. Streamlining, downsizing, or the process of retrenchment by any name, carries with it a human cost. We must therefore make every effort to ensure that the product of reform is greater than the sum of its parts. Within this context, we wish to offer the caution that in our eagerness to integrate Secretariat entities and units the critical thrust and focus of various departments, divisions and programmes, should not be lost. The gasp of the weak and poor all too frequently can barely be heard above the loudly trumpeted agenda of powerful constituencies.

Democracy, human rights and the rule of law have taken on renewed paramountcy, particularly in the post-conflict societies of Latin America. Good governance is the foundation upon which we build structures to ensure sustainable development and durable peace. In both the subregions to which Belize belongs this is a principle that achieves practical as well as intellectual expression. And we find this fact noteworthy: that so soon after internal conflicts convulsed the isthmus, the countries of Central America have been able democratically and constitutionally to reinvigorate their societies. It is also remarkable that so harmoniously has their economic integration movement advanced, that they are now prepared to contemplate the next step of political union. While this is logical, it is also a quantum leap.

Now, for juridical and historical reasons, Belize can only be an observer in this process. But we wish to assure our Central American brothers that in our heart of hearts we too are Morazanistas. We too are uplifted and inspired by this great visionary. And we sympathize keenly with the spirit of the legacy that now animates his modern-day progeny.

In the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) the coming of the single market is only the most dramatic expression of a new solidarity that Belize enthusiastically embraces. We continue to draw vital sustenance from what is, after all, a West Indian partnership rooted in a shared love for, and practice of, democracy, a democracy that is not resting on its laurels, but that is engaged now in a process of revitalization based on the urgent search for collective economic security and social advance.

The proposals for reform encompass suggestions to achieve greater coordination and cooperation among the United Nations agencies and entities which help nations like mine pursue the central priority of sustainable development. We hope, however, that the effectiveness and responsiveness of individual agencies will not be compromised.

More will have to be said about seeking innovative means to attract greater capital to finance development. The argument that a development dividend can be realized by a shift of resources from administration to development activities, is not, to our mind, persuasive. Any possible savings in administrative costs could hardly be adequate enough to make significant progress in our collective effort to eradicate poverty.

We have yet to hear any general admission of satisfaction with the outcome of the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly to review and appraise the implementation of Agenda 21 and other agreements reached at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The special session clearly did not meet expectations for the adoption of clear targets, commitments and specific initiatives as we progress along the road from Rio. Long-term

commitment and concerted action in the field are still critical if we are to continue to meet the needs of a rapidly increasing global population without depleting the resource base on which our very subsistence depends.

We are heartened that the practical agreements reached at the so-called Earth Summit + 5 included those of major concern to small island developing States, such as climate change, tourism and natural disasters. Belize, a country with a low-lying coastal plain, several coral atolls and more than 100 coral islands, experiences challenges similar to those that face small island developing States. At the United Nations we participate within the very active Alliance of Small Island States, and we remain faithful to the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, adopted at the 1994 Global Conference in Barbados. We look forward to the in-depth assessment of the Barbados Programme to be conducted at the forthcoming two-day special session to be held immediately preceding the fifty-fourth regular session of the General Assembly.

Belize will continue to insist that the constituency of low-lying coastal States be accorded the deserved support of the international community so that we too may share in the tangible benefits to be accrued.

Countries like mine will also increasingly depend upon the United Nations to steer the way forward in building the new framework within which developed and developing nations interact. Against the backdrop of globalization and market liberalization, a new partnership is called for. The role of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the regional commissions in examining the issues pertinent to globalization and development and the effective integration of developing countries into the international trading system is especially key, for the recent negative rulings by the World Trade Organization on the European Union banana regime, which secured access for African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, fully demonstrate the dangers inherent in unbridled liberalization shorn of consideration for the special needs of small, vulnerable and disadvantaged economies.

In the current climate, it is perhaps basest apostasy to question the new catechism of free trade. "Revisionism" is a bad word, and heresy will no doubt be swiftly repaid by excommunication. But has not the zeal of the convert blinded us to the humanism of the original aims of preferential access? After all, this was not some hopelessly capricious or unreasoning altruism. Preferential access regimes represented, rather, a real and sincere effort to enable small developing countries to produce for the international marketplace, to offer their societies a chance at a decent standard of living and to assure them a special stake in the global economy.

Although economic thinking has changed, the objective conditions of poor countries have not. Fervent recitation of the new mantra alone can never wipe out the diseconomies of scale for small, primary-producing States. We cannot now compete on equal terms. Yet our calls go unheeded for the comprehensive capital inflows and technical assistance so vitally necessary to achieve the structural adjustment that will enable us to participate equitably in the new trading arrangements. I repeat to the industrialized world what surely has now become our *cri de coeur*: do not cut off our legs, then tell us to run.

Development is still one of the most important aspirations in today's world. To return to my earlier complaint, the achievement of economic growth and sustainable development has not been balanced throughout the five regions that United Nations comprises. It is an understatement to say that globalization and economic liberalization have had a different kind of impact on some of us. A few nations now enjoy the increased well-being, while others are visited only by deepening marginalization.

The recently adopted United Nations Agenda for Development stresses the role of the Organization in development matters. The Agenda is one concrete manner in which we can collectively address the issues and problems relevant to development and, in particular, development's peculiar relationship with peace, democracy, good governance and human rights.

Belize repeats its call for an annual observance by the General Assembly at which development policy would be the focus of debate. Such encounters could maintain the Agenda's impetus, as well as provide a forum for discussing effective and coordinated follow-through with regard to commitments made at the several global conferences.

Preventive diplomacy and peacemaking are still the best means at the Organization's disposal in its efforts at conflict avoidance. The wide range of activities carried out in the name of preventive diplomacy must ever be mindful that success can be guaranteed only with the consent of all parties.

Both the Security Council and the General Assembly, in extending existing operations or authorizing additional ones, must continue to issue clear mandates. In the light of the financial situation, some collective discipline will have to be applied in authorizing mandates when adequate resources are not available.

On a related subject, we have learned of efforts under way to develop the Organization's rapid-deployment capability. This dimension is necessary, but any deployment in this sense must withstand the scrutiny of national consent. Again, we would prefer to see the preventive aspect stressed rather than the enforcement side. Further, a rapid-reaction capability is not needed solely to respond to threats to peace in the traditional sense. Recent measures employed to enhance the Organization's humanitarian response to both man-made and natural disasters are also demonstrative of the requirement for the institutionalization of a rapid-response capability.

In the Secretary-General's programme for reform, deserved emphasis is placed on strengthening international cooperation to combat the new threats to civil society. The deleterious effects of crime, drugs and terrorism know no borders.

The administrative changes to be instituted by the Secretariat to focus action through the United Nations crime prevention and criminal justice programme should give us the upper hand in waging war against the forces of uncivil society.

Countries such as mine expend huge amounts of limited resources in addressing these concerns, which, in a small State, can amount to nothing less than threats to national security. Further, we are convinced that the global nature of the problem requires the highest level of international cooperation that can be achieved. This must embody the concept of multilateralism and reject unilateral devices which disrespect the sovereignty of States.

Belize's declaration affirming respect for the personality, sovereignty and independence of States, which was sponsored by 30 members of the Organization of American States (OAS) at the twenty-seventh session of its General Assembly at Lima, Peru, speaks directly to this issue and strongly promotes the spirit of partnership that must underpin an interdependent approach to addressing the common problem of narcotics trafficking and abuse.

International cooperation in this regard must mean the avoidance of not just political, but also of economic, unilateralism. For example, the banana industry in my country may well be destroyed by the efforts of the very people who claim to be our partners in the fight against illicit drugs. We have a saying in Belize that the same knife that sticks the sheep sticks the goat. If the prosperity of strategically vulnerable southern Belize is to be sacrificed now on the altar of the new orthodoxy, it will not be long before the substitute blandishments of the drug trade undermine our national anti-narcotics efforts to the point where they too become only burnt offerings at the feet of the deity. The immutable, compassionless law of the market is very much a two-edged sword.

It is in this context that the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly on illicit drugs is especially timely. It will afford Member States an opportunity to discuss joint action in preventing money laundering, international cooperation in judicial affairs and law enforcement. But the debate must be a thoroughly holistic one that looks carefully at the interrelatedness of economic well-being and effective anti-narcotics policies.

We commend the prudence of this Assembly in its decision that the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters Related to the Security Council should continue deliberations during the current session.

In the absence of any general agreement within the Working Group, Belize would find it difficult to accept a strict deadline in relation to Council expansion. Further, we do not wish to see qualitative distinctions in the decision making ability of existing and possible new permanent members. We note with gratitude that Belize's comprehensive proposals on the subject are still included among the views being considered.

On another issue related to reform, the principles of equitability and universality confer urgency on the claim for consideration of the Republic of China on Taiwan. Twenty-one million people living in a successful, robust and prosperous democracy should be entitled at the very least to a discussion of their circumstances. The blanket "no", the annual ritual that continues to slam the door shut on even the possibility of debating their aspirations, is irrational and unenlightened. A way must be found to review this situation in a manner consistent with the rights of the parties and the spirit of the Charter.

This Organization, it appears, is completing a period of intense self-examination and introspection. We must continue to counter the influences that would ascribe a diminished role to multilateralism. Our flexibility and a visible search for consensus have enabled us to retool. We are demonstrating that we are still equal to the tasks ahead. With reform and renewal moving to the fore this year, it is clear that the crisis of confidence is over.

With an able chief executive, the United Nations is now, therefore, strengthening and repositioning itself to surmount the challenges that face us.

It is our sincere wish that in the weeks ahead we will reach a new pass in our great undertaking, and that momentous debate will result in keen, relevant and timely decision-making.

The President: I now call on the Chairman of the delegation of Antigua and Barbuda, His Excellency Mr. Patrick Albert Lewis.

Mr. Lewis (Antigua and Barbuda): On behalf of the Government and people of Antigua and Barbuda, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to preside over this fifty-second session of the General Assembly. You are well known to many of the envoys to the United Nations, and we feel confident that under your guidance we will have a productive session. I likewise wish to express my country's recognition to the Permanent Representative of Malaysia, for the manner in which he conducted the work of the fifty-first session. I also pay tribute to the Secretary-General, who is entrusted with the advancement of this Organization at such a critical time in its history.

One cannot walk through the edifices of the United Nations without being asked to comment on the reform process and the value of the number of conferences that the Organization has staged. The conferences of this decade have certainly had an impact on our understanding of certain concepts, practices and generationally imparted beliefs. Though we have taken many decisions, implementation has proved to be difficult, and a fundamental aspect of the reason or reasons for this is that the United Nations needs to be reformed, and Governments need to zealously renew their commitments to its existence and continued advancement.

The Secretary-General's report is most welcome, and there are many points on which my country is in agreement and others on which we think continued discussion and debate are needed. Peace, security and disarmament are vital to a safe and secure planet, and the countless individuals who live daily in constant fear — whether because of terrorists, hatred between ethnic groups, internecine warfare or religious persecution — gives us much concern.

The Organization must have trained and equipped forces at all times, and the decision of a group of Member States to participate in the establishment of a standby high-readiness brigade is most encouraging. Additionally, there is a need for the demobilization of paramilitary groups, for demining and for an intensification of peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building. Subsequently, the problems associated with financing peace operations need to be addressed in a meaningful manner.

Antigua and Barbuda strongly supports the concept of results-based budgeting and endorses the proposal to have the Secretary-General and the representatives of Member States enter into a dialogue aimed at shifting the United Nations programme budget from a system of input accounting to one of results-based accountability. Likewise, my country welcomes the reforms already put in place in the Secretariat, through which field operations have been considerably expanded, as a result of cooperation between the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and other relevant departments.

We are anxiously looking forward to June of next year, when the diplomatic conference on the need to establish an international criminal court will convene. This undertaking is long overdue, and Antigua and Barbuda has been working with neighbouring countries to thwart the dangers of increased international crime, which is so active in this hemisphere. Of particular concern is the need for greater coordination among nations if the blight of narcotics is to be meaningfully tackled. Strong and determined efforts within certain countries will be seriously undermined if there is not a united global approach to manifestations and practices which will destroy not only the fabric of our societies but the lives of countless individuals.

The most talked-about aspect of reform, however, is the "Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters". Numerous proposals on the question have been advanced, some adding more confusion to the existing deliberations. As such, Antigua and Barbuda

wishes to reiterate its declared position that any expansion should include developing countries, and that both the Group of African States and the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States should be represented.

We would similarly like to see certain restrictions placed on the use of the veto. We understand that all efforts at restructuring and reform in the United Nations, however, should be focused on economic growth and development. In addition, my country is calling for a reversal in the diminishing role of the General Assembly. The accountability of the Security Council to the General Assembly must be re-emphasized, and the General Assembly should more actively assert its role in the maintenance of international peace and security, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 377 (V) of 3 November 1950, entitled "Uniting for peace".

The buzzword that we are constantly hearing is "globalization". Those of us from small developing countries would rather have the emphasis placed on poverty alleviation, but the present-day reality incorporates the belief that the emphasized process of globalization and economic integration is unavoidable. There are new techniques of production and new forms of organization which have given flexibility to the location of industrial activities and have reduced the share of wages in production costs. In many of our democratic societies throughout the world, where sacrifices have been made to reduce unemployment, Governments are faced with the daunting and even frightening reality that labour is becoming a dispensable commodity. The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization all are promoting the emergence of a global market. The small countries of the Caribbean are forced to adapt, and our businessmen must accept the reality that the concept of protected markets is fast disappearing.

The multilateral financial institutions which provide resources to developing countries at concessional rates continue to use the gross national product as a basis for judging our economic wherewithal. Antigua and Barbuda is deemed to be middle-income, but the reality of my country's various vulnerabilities causes our people and those of other Caribbean countries to bow to the flattery and highlight the unjustness of this means of measurement.

Our sister island of Montserrat has recently had a series of severe volcanic eruptions which have caused the inhabitants much pain and anguish, and Antigua and Barbuda, along with other Caribbean Community countries, has endeavoured to render assistance. As a result, the population of Antigua and Barbuda has increased by some 5 percent, which means that the resources of Government for housing, health, education and all other services are strained. Our citizens have, however, rendered much support, and Antigua and Barbuda will do all in its power to help alleviate the plight of our brothers and sisters from that lovely but now unsafe island. We strongly support the recommendation of the Committee of 24 that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme should move swiftly to assist in alleviating the plight of the sturdy but beleaguered population of the Emerald Isle of the Caribbean.

There are other dangerous volcanoes in the Caribbean, and one is presently forming undersea in the vicinity of Grenada. In 1974 Antigua and Barbuda experienced an earthquake which measured 7.8 on the Richter scale and which caused considerable destruction. In 1995 Hurricane Luis unleashed its fury on our country for 48 hours and was declared to have been the worst storm of the century. Indeed, a single hurricane can set back our development some 10 years. Yet the gross national product continues to be used to measure our economic performance, resulting in the absurd distortion of Antigua and Barbuda's being deemed more developed than Mexico or Brazil.

We are pleased to read that at the 1995 Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development, the conclusion was reached that an economic system has no intrinsic value. It has to be assessed in relation to the betterment of the human condition. As such, a good economic system should of necessity provide opportunities for sufficient income to all members of the society; generate enough resources to enable public institutions to fulfil their responsibilities and promote the common good; and permit, in addition to the government, participation by citizens and other public and private actors in the decision-making process. To this end, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda is presently holding meetings in various forums to discuss precisely the realities of globalization and the achievement of a single market within the Caribbean Community.

In June of this year a special session of the General Assembly was held on the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21. Though there was disappointment at the outcome due to the inability of countries to coalesce around a common position or common commitments, there was the clear recognition that the threat to the global commons remains a profound

reality. There is continued overexploitation and degradation of what has been bequeathed to mankind, whether in regard to overfishing, overgrazing, excessive destruction of forests, or air and water pollution. We have collectively failed to capitalize on the promise and accomplishments of the 1992 Rio Conference.

Nine out of ten people in both the developed and developing world have no idea what the term "sustainable development" means and how it affects them. Nine out of ten also have little appreciation of why mutual recognition and mutual action are necessary. People have not been made partners in the process of sustainable development, and Governments should do more to make them so by education via the mass media, in the schools, in public debate and in public presentations.

The industrialized countries must take the lead in changing their patterns of production and consumption to save the global environment and assist developing countries such as mine in our effort to meet our peoples' basic needs, to eradicate poverty and achieve economic growth. During the special session in June, Caribbean newspapers reported that every Caribbean representative zeroed in on the "poverty issue".

To eradicate poverty and achieve economic growth is not an easy task and has been further compounded by the fact that official development assistance, a crucial part of the Rio agreements, has fallen from 0.33 per cent in 1992 to 0.27 per cent in 1995. This is well below the agreed and accepted target of 0.7 per cent of the gross national product of the industrialized countries pledged to development assistance. The precipitous fall in official development assistance has shifted the burden for sustainable development unfairly to developing countries, destroying in the process the equitable balance which was reached at that very important Conference. Private capital and foreign direct investment, once touted as the panacea for sustainable development in developing countries, have shown only selective benefits to some countries and have bypassed the vast majority. A combination of private capital flows, foreign direct investment and debt relief as part of an overall financial package may be a solution.

In recognizing that an integrated approach to sustainable development is necessary, since political, economic, social and environmental issues are closely interlinked and intertwined, we cannot overlook the integral role that women can and should play in the quest for sustainable development. In Rio, women were considered a major group whose involvement was necessary to receive the sought-after goals. Mainstreaming women's concerns and participation in the planning, implementation and monitoring of all development and management of environmental programmes to ensure that women benefit is necessary for sustainable development. In this regard, we call on the multilateral and bilateral donors to increase their support for women's organizations in countries such as mine to enable them to play an active role in all aspects of the developmental process.

There is, however, the fact that we must stress repeatedly: the need to reduce the speed of the globalization thrust. Dominant Governments and institutions are setting deadlines and establishing agendas with such severe demands that most other actors find them impossible to follow. The alternative to participation, as it now stands, is marginalization. If all countries are required to fully participate, then there is a clear need for selective linking processes with reference to both national circumstances and national cultures.

This brings me to the vexing question of bananas. The undoing of the Lomé trade agreement and the injury which this hostile act will inflict on small, banana-exporting countries of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, of which Antigua and Barbuda is a member, is tantamount to an act of war. Small, peace-loving States, causing no harm to any other State under the terms of the Lomé agreement, have found themselves yoked by the recent World Trade Organization ruling. Without some form of protection, the banana industry in the States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) would collapse, leading to severe social dislocation which would ultimately manifest itself in political catastrophe. Be reminded that on more than one occasion, the President of the United States has cautioned that in this galloping global economy, small States cannot be trampled upon by their large neighbours.

When my country chose to host in May of this year the regional seminar of the Committee of 24, better known as the Special Committee on Decolonization, it was because we knew that the Caribbean has many other obstacles to overcome in the emerging history of our region and the global community. Highlighted at the meeting was the principled position of the Special Committee that the sustained economic growth and social advancement of the Non-Self-Governing Territories is an essential prerequisite of the implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Of necessity, particular attention has to be given to the environment, natural disaster

mitigation, public health, education, economic self-sufficiency, the prevention of crime and illicit drug trafficking.

The Non-Self-Governing Territories of the Caribbean have the same problems as the independent countries in regard to narcotics. There is a multidimensional thrust upon our entities, as there is the challenge to governability by non-State actors, the drug operators. Caribbean countries additionally have to contend with extraterritoriality and other forms of sovereignty challenges from other States, primarily because of conflicting interests and because the Caribbean States are small and lack significant power.

The countries of CARICOM are, however, endeavouring to improve most aspects of their existence, and new ground in the integration arrangement has been broken. Haiti has joined the ranks of CARICOM, a development which is considered to be of immense significance, and we wish to applaud the decision to have the United Nations Mission in Haiti extended. There has been further movement towards the CARICOM single market and economy. When Protocol II is ratified, the ground will be laid for the free movement of factors of production among countries which have agreed to be bound by its provisions. A plan is being developed for the sustainability of both tourist and airline industries in the region. Approval was given to a comprehensive human resource development plan for the specific purpose of building a more creative and productive workforce in the Caribbean. Indeed, the countries of CARICOM are endeavouring to overcome the major legacy of colonialism: being placed on the periphery of the industrialized world.

As a collective body seeking the betterment of mankind, the countries which form the United Nations need to recognize that human advancement requires managing markets as well as liberating them. Clearly, unbridled markets tend to produce a race to the bottom, manifested through a global search for the location with the weakest regulatory, environmental, social and labour standards. What is required is for rich and poor countries to have a commonality of purpose that ensures a path of sustainable development. Year after year my country pleads for genuine acceptance of the principle of multilateralism, yet what is projected under the banner is of a selective nature projected by and through the powerful and the dominant. Together we must find a way towards a global regime that reduces emissions of greenhouse gases, accepting the necessity of well-off nations to transfer the technology to make this possible rather than viewing this shift as another opportunity for private industry to profit.

It is sad that competitiveness can be pushed in a direction which handicaps and retards human development. State socialism failed, and in the process deprived hundreds of millions of individuals of both liberty and prosperity. Market forces, taken to the extreme, yield poorly distributed rates of growth, plunder the natural environment and are most devastating in regard to the wreckage of humans. The States of the developing world are not just emerging markets, they are human societies. Markets must be our servant, not our master. Clearly, the reality of commerce is global, but the paths to human development have historically been proven to be local.

In approaching the twenty-first century, the Government of the twin island States of Antigua and Barbuda has decided that it should focus on human capital and its development rather than focusing narrowly on the economic question. There will be a continuance of the policy of carrying out intense investigations and feasibility studies to decide where to concentrate limited resources. In addition, even though the Government is divesting itself of some of its holdings and encouraging greater private investment in vital services and commodities, there are some areas, particularly those surrounding technology, in which the Government has to remain directly involved and catalytic; it will continue with its practice of seeking consensus on determining key industries and activities crucial and critical for development.

We will continue to take pride in and to cherish the United Nations, as we recognize its capacity for achievements in areas beyond the reach of national or regional authorities. Now the nations which comprise this body must redouble their collective commitment for translating vision into reality. That is why it is essential to have international cooperation for development in the forefront of our activities. The United Nations is still our greatest hope for peace, development and social justice.

The President: I call now on His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Attaf, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria.

Mr. Attaf (Algeria) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, Sir, gives me the pleasant opportunity to congratulate you most warmly and to wish

you all the best for success in carrying out the noble task entrusted to you.

I wish also to pay tribute to your predecessor, Ambassador Razali Ismail, who discharged his mandate with a skill and effectiveness that earned our respect and appreciation.

My praise goes also to Mr. Kofi Annan, who since taking up his duties has worked with courage and selflessness to revitalize the Organization with a view to bringing it into step with the times and with the aspirations of the peoples it brings together.

We are meeting once again at a time when it is being confirmed and reconfirmed that the international Organization is facing a comprehensive transition involving two fundamental questions: whether mankind is able, first, to form a concept of the Organization and to put that concept into practice, and secondly, to ensure that the concept and its implementation enjoy universal participation rather than being the sole preserve of the dominant Powers.

The fact is that this transition has both a political and a strategic dimension. Now, soon after the cold war, the closure of the East-West rift and the end of the bipolar system, we must find a new pattern of balances in order to establish a new, more just and more unified world order, a world order that respects the interests and aspirations of all, a world order that quite simply restores the values and ideals on which our Organization was built.

This transitional phase also has a basic economic dimension: the challenge of globalization, which must be faced by us all in unity so that there will be room for the aspirations of each of us. The test is to master globalization, for unbridled globalization would bring new setbacks and new exclusions, which would pose a threat to all.

Finally, this transition has a new dimension: that of coping with threats thus far misunderstood or underestimated, such as the scourges of international terrorism, drug trafficking, international organized crime and environmental degradation. In a related vein, we must share the objective of establishing States based on the rule of law, human rights and good governance as the foundation of the new international relations we are building.

Clearly, the United Nations is an active partner in this global transition; hence, it must first of all adapt itself to ongoing changes so that it can influence their development. The Secretary-General has in fact taken the good step of beginning reflection along these lines, for which we commend him, and has taken the initiative to reform the Organization.

Here, let me share some of my thoughts on this great plan for the future.

My first thought is somewhat methodological in nature. In the package of reforms submitted we distinctly see those which come within the sole purview of the Secretary-General of our Organization, and he has the right as well as the duty to implement these reforms. But at the same time, it is equally clear that other proposed reforms come only within the purview of Member States, which must naturally discuss them before taking a decision.

My second thought gives me the opportunity first of all to express our satisfaction at the inclusion of new priorities in United Nations activities — be they in the area of human rights, humanitarian affairs, the environment, combating terrorism or the crackdown on drug trafficking. These are all new universal concerns, and the United Nations has a central place in dealing with them.

Having said that, the objective of streamlining our Organization's activities should not sacrifice what has been and remains the very reason for being of the United Nations — the two pillars on which it has always rested, namely peace and development.

From this standpoint, international cooperation for development, as much as international security and disarmament affairs, must not suffer on account of the restructuring contemplated. Otherwise, the credibility and effectiveness of the United Nations would be eroded in these areas of action, which are destined to remain at the forefront of the challenges which our countries will have to face.

My third thought concerns the financial crisis of our Organization. Proposals made by the Secretary-General, be it to introduce a new culture of management of resources or to create a revolving fund, are of some interest. However, it is important that Member States be motivated, first and foremost, by the obligation they have pursuant to the provisions of the Charter to pay their contribution to the budget of the Organization regularly and fully. This, in effect, is where we find the genuine

and lasting solution to a problem which seems to go on indefinitely and which should be distinguished and solved as such, without its serving as justification for depriving the United Nations of essential functions which it intends to undertake in the service of all.

My fourth thought relates to the United Nations General Assembly. If it has become absolutely necessary today to streamline the work of this central body and to re-examine its programme and work methods, we should, by the same token, see to it that the Assembly continues to be the special forum of States where essential issues concerning peace, security and development can be debated and considered. This is certainly one of the most appropriate ways to ensure effective participation in the management of world affairs, in our quest for solutions to international problems, and to promote genuine democratization of international relations.

In the era of democracy, transparency and proper management that we are claiming for our countries, there is nothing more normal than to insist, together, on the same values and principles in this Organization which unites us.

It is in this same spirit that we see the problem of the legal nature of General Assembly decisions and resolutions, which should be given the necessary effectiveness. It is also in this spirit that we see the problem of re-balancing the powers of the Secretary-General and the General Assembly, which should come consistently within the scope of redefining all the relationships among the principal organs of the United Nations.

Finally, and this is my last thought, a revision of the United Nations Charter is of crucial importance and requires in-depth thought which would raise our Organization to a level on par with the vision, principles and objectives which are inherent in it.

In this same line of thought, and even if this goes beyond the context of reforms proposed by the Secretary-General, I would like to refer to the issue of the expansion of the Security Council. The Council is, quite obviously, the body whose role and responsibilities best reflect the hopes, expectations and, above all, the frustrations of States. Consequently, it is important that the reform tries to reflect correctly the qualitative and quantitative changes which have taken place in international relations.

The enhancement of the political and moral authority, as well as the legitimacy, of this vital body requires a balanced representation within it, whether with regard to permanent or non-permanent seats. Furthermore, any decisions regarding its expansion and the revision of its methods of deliberation and decision-making would benefit by having the broadest possible support of Member States.

The declaration of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Non-Aligned Countries in New Delhi in April 1997, which was reaffirmed here in New York, and that of African heads of State and Government in Harare in June 1997 are, in this regard, valuable contributions for our collective thinking regarding the membership and functioning of the Security Council which we all hope will serve our common expectations.

Among the new challenges facing the international community, terrorism is the one which apparently is the most formidable because of its threats not only to the basic rights of the individual but also to the very democratic foundations of our societies. No State can consider itself immune from these threats in the long run.

In this regard, we should welcome the international community's awareness which has taken shape of the real nature of this phenomenon. This has been accompanied by greater mobilization of efforts against this scourge, which, above and beyond hindering economic and social development of States, engenders the most serious dangers to international peace and security. In addition, we should welcome the decision of the General Assembly to include the campaign against international terrorism among the major priorities in its medium-term plan of action. The present stage requires that we make effective use of every achievement by guiding United Nations action in an innovative and practical direction, based on operational legal aspects of multilateral activities against terrorism.

Mr. Kamara (Guinea), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In the same vein, the conclusion of an international convention to suppress acts of terrorism in an integrated, global manner must be one of the major priority areas for more effective international action. The international community must, above all, resolutely respond to the needs of the struggle against terrorism, depriving terrorists of sanctuary and strictly abiding by the relevant international instruments.

In every sphere, Algeria is continuing to work for the emergence and consolidation of mutually beneficial frameworks for dialogue, solidarity and cooperation and for the promotion of relations based on confidence, mutual respect and common interest. That is what guides Algeria in its commitment to building a Maghreb that is united, acts in solidarity and is stable and prosperous. Algeria, which has made the Maghreb project a national priority, is resolved to work together with its partners there to relaunch the process of building the Maghreb on a solid and durable basis.

To this end, my country is contributing to the search for a just and lasting solution to the question of Western Sahara. Aware of its responsibilities as both a neighbouring country and an official observer of the Settlement Plan, Algeria has repeatedly urged the international community to shoulder its responsibilities with regard to the peace process in Western Sahara. The recent agreement in Houston, resulting from the direct talks between the Kingdom of Morocco and the POLISARIO Front, under the auspices of Mr. James Baker, the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General, brought a solution to problems that had until then prevented implementation of the United Nations Settlement Plan. This constitutes major progress towards the final settlement of this conflict, and Algeria, like the rest of the international community, is delighted. Concerned for the stability and security of the region, Algeria will continue to make a full contribution to the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy aimed at the holding of a referendum to enable the people of Western Sahara freely to exercise their right to self-determination.

In the Mediterranean almost a quarter of a century ago my country distinguished itself through its pioneering role in highlighting the indivisible link between the two coasts of our common sea with regard to security and cooperation matters. The Helsinki process began at that time. Because of its dedication to the Barcelona process, Algeria is today continuing to work to establish and consolidate permanent frameworks for dialogue and cooperation so as to ensure that we deal in a satisfactory manner with the political, security, economic and human concerns of all the States in the European-Mediterranean theatre as well as the legitimate aspirations of their peoples. We are encouraged in this regard by the reaffirmation at the Second Euro-Mediterranean Conference, held in Malta on 15 and 16 April 1997, of the dedication of the Mediterranean countries to the Barcelona process, which rightly constitutes a major political achievement that should be preserved and promoted.

In the same context, I am pleased to refer to the holding of the fourth meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Mediterranean Forum in Algiers on 11 and 12 July. This provided the European-Mediterranean theatre with a special meeting place for dialogue to foster mutual understanding and give a new dynamic to the promotion of the European-Mediterranean partnership, at both the multilateral and bilateral levels.

Within the Mediterranean theatre, recent developments in the Middle East are in many respects causing great alarm and legitimate concerns on the part of the international community. Prospects for peace that were recently opened up by the peace process now seem dangerously distant, and fear of a return to confrontation is increasing every day.

At the heart of the current impasse are the Israeli Administration's renunciation of the Oslo declaration and the Washington agreements; its negation of the principle of land for peace and its refusal to resume negotiations at the point at which they were suspended; and its continuing policy of settlement, including in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, where a programme of systematic judaization is continuing. The Israeli Administration must understand that only a lasting peace — that is, a just and comprehensive peace — can ensure genuine security for all the peoples of the region.

The revitalization of the peace process requires the Israeli Administration urgently to end its unilateral actions, which are contrary to the spirit and letter of the commitments that it entered into.

Similarly, it cannot indefinitely and with impunity go against the will of the international community, which has set as an absolute requirement for peace withdrawal from the Golan and southern Lebanon, as well as the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people, including their right to an independent State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Also in that part of the world the Iraqi people are continuing to suffer unjustly from the effects of a cruel embargo. My country can only renew its appeal for the lifting of sanctions, which have lasted for too long and cannot be justified today. This appeal also applies to the situation of the Libyan people, who also continue to be subjected to an embargo that is as unjust as it is invalid.

Given the start of the process of disengagement from Africa by the international community, and the

dangers of marginalization, Africa's resurgence demonstrates its firm determination to take charge of its destiny and to break the cycle of dependence once and for all. This welcome development also demonstrates the collective determination of Africa to face the considerable challenges that confront it by relying first and foremost on its own resources. In fact, every day Africa gives the lie to the theory that it is condemned to be a zone without laws or development, a zone of insecurity and instability.

The democracy and pluralism, which are gaining ground every day in Africa and taking firm hold and the economic growth at rates that are often spectacular, point to new development prospects. At the same time, Africa is showing a promising capacity for conflict management and resolution.

The establishment of the Organization of African Unity Central Organ's Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution and the Treaty setting up the African Economic Community are the product of the spirit of solidarity and mutual assistance which is rooted in African culture and of a strategy for giving fresh impetus to intra-African factors of integration and complementarity. This is the forum to state that the international community must encourage and help these praiseworthy efforts.

In this regard, we welcome the convening of a special ministerial meeting of the Security Council on Africa, which is a major political advance. We venture to hope that we are thereby taking steps towards international solidarity with the African continent, which will finally be considered an active partner which cannot be excluded from humankind's great march towards the fulfilment of its destiny.

The signs of recovery which have recently been evident through the growth of the world economy are a real source of satisfaction. However, this slight improvement needs to be consolidated so as to make it the lasting trend of the end of the century.

In this regard, it is particularly important that the problems of development around the world, and particularly in developing countries, be given priority, since the current contribution of developing countries is still well below their potential and falls short of the role they legitimately want to play.

The phenomenon of globalization, which promises so much, instead continues to bring great uncertainty to the countries of the South, which is compounded by concern at seeing many of them further marginalized and even excluded from the long-awaited overall development process they so desire. This state of affairs is mainly due to a structure of international relations still marked by the North-South divide. It highlights the continuation of the basically adverse nature of an international economic environment characterized by the North's increasing monopoly of the decisive elements of development: trade, financial and stock markets, flows of capital and investment, and technology transfer.

The countries of the South have made economically and socially costly adjustments, and carried out bold reforms in their quest for greater integration into world trade, but they still encounter numerous difficulties. These are aggravated by, *inter alia*: stifling external indebtedness; a continued deterioration of the terms of trade; an alarming decline in official development assistance; and an equally worrying reduction of international cooperation for development in general.

These disturbing trends are in contrast with the global consensus that has emerged during major international conferences organized over the past decade under the auspices of the United Nations. They raise legitimate questions as to the very future of the system established to organize international cooperation for development.

On the eve of the third millennium, and at a time when we are trying to find consensus on the need to reform our Organization to prepare it to take up challenges and face future tasks, we all need to do some soul-searching. Tomorrow's United Nations will be what we, the peoples of the United Nations, want it to be. And the new United Nations that our countries intend to build will, above all, need to be freed from the mistakes and bad habits of the past.

Yesterday, the United Nations was a melting pot for the ideals and values that unite us; tomorrow its job is to reconcile these ideals and values with all the expectations of our peoples and nations that are still to be met. This reform project should result in our ideals and values being dealt with in the only way that matters, namely, turned into a vision that become reality. This is what lies at the heart of this major project which we can undertake for the United Nations and, in the final analysis, for ourselves.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of

the Lao People's Democratic Republic, His Excellency Mr. Somsavat Lengsavad, on whom I now call.

Mr. Lengsavad (Lao People's Democratic Republic) (*spoke in Laotian; interpretation from French text furnished by the delegation*): In accordance with tradition, I take this opportunity to begin by congratulating the President most warmly on his assumption of the presidency of the fifty-second session of the United Nations General Assembly. His unanimous election, which has placed him in this highly responsible post in this important international arena, is a warm tribute to his country, Ukraine. I wish him every possible success in the discharge of his difficult duties.

I would also like to congratulate his predecessor, Mr. Razali Ismail, Permanent Representative of Malaysia, on his dynamic presidency during the last session of the General Assembly.

The Lao delegation also wishes to express its appreciation to Mr. Kofi Annan, our new Secretary-General, for his good work so far. His first nine months at the helm of our Organization have been a time of strenuous effort and resolute action aimed at reforming our universal Organization to make it more effective and better suited to meeting today's challenges. To our new Secretary-General, we express our sincere wishes for success in shouldering his weighty and great responsibilities.

The general trend towards dialogue and cooperation between States and peoples for the progress of humankind in this new era continues to characterize international relations. Clearly, we are delighted because on the whole this is highly positive. However, in several regions of the world we still witness persistent tension and conflict, due to interference in the internal affairs of States; the implementation of policies aimed at hegemony over developing States; and tribal, ethnic, religious and other divisions. This situation of tension and conflict is a potential threat to peaceful coexistence and harmony between States, and may even jeopardize the current atmosphere of international cooperation to promote development. In the interests of world peace, a sine qua non for the promotion of socio-economic development, we should work together patiently and resolutely, to find realistic and appropriate solutions as soon as possible.

In Europe, the peace accords signed in Dayton on 14 December 1995 opened the door to resolving the painful and destructive conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We truly hope that the parties concerned will sincerely and strictly honour their commitments in order to preserve the fragile peace and cooperation in that region.

In some African countries tribal and ethnic conflicts continue to rage, causing serious harm to their peoples. We express our sincere sympathy to the peoples of these countries over the untold suffering they have had to endure. The Lao People's Democratic Republic considers it imperative that the international community, and in particular the countries concerned, redouble efforts to resolve these disputes as quickly as possible.

In the Caribbean, multifaceted cooperation between the States of the region continues to grow, thus contributing to peace and security in that part of the world. In this context, it is time the United States of America made greater efforts and undertook reasonable negotiations with the Republic of Cuba to resolve their differences, in the interest of both the American and the Cuban peoples and in the interest of regional and global peace.

In the Middle East, the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, in accordance with the Washington accords signed in 1993, marked a crucial stage in the search for a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which dates back over 30 years. The peace process which had been set in motion is now confronting grave difficulties, as the recent violence clearly demonstrates. The Lao People's Democratic Republic expresses its grave concern regarding this situation. We very much hope that the parties concerned — Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization — will show great wisdom, and even greater restraint, and will engage in serious negotiations to resolve their problem, thus contributing to restoring peace and stability to this sensitive region.

In the Korean peninsula, the implementation by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States of America of agreements that had been concluded and the recent opening in New York of preliminary quadripartite talks on peace in Korea are important stages in the efforts to ease tension and confrontation in that region. In this context, the Lao Government and people, while welcoming the efforts of the parties concerned, express their unswerving support for the legitimate aspirations of the Korean people to live in peace and achieve the peaceful reunification of the Korean homeland.

In South-East Asia, efforts to strengthen economic, cultural and other cooperation and improve the settlement of disputes by peaceful means are clearly priorities.

The admission of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar as fully fledged members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) on 23 July last was a historic event of great significance. It is our firm hope that an ASEAN of 10 will become a reality in the near future and will contribute to strengthening our region, and making it more prosperous, in the interests of peace, stability and cooperation in Asia and the Pacific, and in the world at large.

Another problem which has aroused international concern is the recent event in Cambodia. Fortunately, the current Government has been able to restore normality in accordance with the country's legislative procedures. The international community, including the Lao People's Democratic Republic, continues to recognize and respect His Majesty King Norodom Sihanouk as Head of State of Cambodia. It is our hope that all countries and the United Nations will also respect his royal authority.

In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, political stability continues to be solidly guaranteed. The multi-ethnic Lao people are living in solidarity and unity — a fact which ensures social harmony. In accordance with our Constitution, the fourth elections for the National Assembly will be held in mid-December. That election will once again demonstrate the fervent patriotic spirit of the Lao people and the development of its democracy towards the establishment of a State of law, a State of the people, by the people and for the people.

In the economic sphere, implementation of the renewal policy, which began in 1986, has made it possible for our economy to experience sustained growth, with an annual rate for the past five years of approximately 7 per cent. Unfortunately, this year, my country suffered equally sizeable losses because of natural disasters and the repercussions of financial recession in South-East Asia. Nonetheless, cooperation between Laos and the international community remains very strong.

Parallel with its admission to ASEAN, the Lao People's Democratic Republic continues to strengthen its relations of bilateral cooperation with neighbouring countries in the region and in the world on the basis of the principles of equality and mutual interest. In order to ensure the sustained development of the national economy, the Lao Government has taken important measures to integrate its economy and its market with those of the region and of the world. This integration is of great benefit to national and foreign investors thanks to the country's economic and other potential such as its geographical location, in relation to major regional markets, its transit role, its role as a supplier of hydroelectric power to neighbouring countries and export producer, using the country's raw materials, and its innumerable natural tourist attractions.

Following up its endeavours and successes of the last 10 years through the implementation of its renewal policy, the Lao Government firmly intends to continue its policy of developing the country on the basis of a market economy and broadening relations of cooperation with the international community. Its aim is to extricate the country from its state of underdevelopment by the year 2020 and to establish a preliminary basis for its gradual transformation into an industrialized, modern country under the slogan "Building a strong and prosperous country, ensuring the well-being of the people, forming a civilized and fair society".

The world economy is seeing some signs of growth. Nonetheless, this growth falls short of expectations. We witness growing inequalities between developing and developed countries. The international economic environment in terms of access to markets and financial resources granted on preferential terms for development purposes is, in general, in decline. Faced with this situation, the developed countries must spare no effort to take the necessary steps by coordinating their macroeconomic policies in order to bring about a recovery of the world economy thanks to a stronger liberalization of trade, which would contribute to establishing an international economic environment more favourable to development.

The problem of drug abuse remains a subject of international concern. My country has taken many national and international measures with a view to contributing to the global effort to eradicate this scourge from the face of the earth. For the first time, in May, the Lao People's Democratic Republic was unanimously elected a member of the important Commission on Narcotic Drugs by the Economic and Social Council. We are profoundly grateful to the international community for this demonstration of confidence and support and we will make every effort to discharge our responsibilities honourably.

Last June, after over three years of hard work, the General Assembly adopted, without a vote, An Agenda for Development. The Lao People's Democratic Republic is pleased at its adoption, which it regards as an important stage in the effort to build a real partnership between the developed and developing countries. The Agenda for Development, a highly valuable document, provides a foundation of principles, objectives, measures and actions which can serve as a guide to Member States in the global approach to development questions in the immediate and long term and at the national and international levels.

That June, the General Assembly met in special session to review the implementation of Agenda 21 five years after the Rio Summit on environment and development. At the conclusion of that session, a follow-up programme on the implementation of Agenda 21 was adopted without a vote; the importance of that implementation, *inter alia*, to the eradication of poverty in the years to come was stressed. The international community is therefore called on to exert every effort to strengthen cooperation to make this programme a reality.

As we near the twenty-first century, the United Nations — the only universal multilateral body — has an important role to play in the consideration and management of international affairs. If it is to be commensurate with that task, our Organization must adapt to the new dynamic and complex world. In this context, we express our sincere gratitude to our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the important initiatives of his programme of reform, issued last July, which aim at reorganizing our global body in order to make it more flexible in its structure and more efficient in its actions. This very important programme generally tries to take the interests of Member States into account.

In considering these questions, it is necessary to emphasize that any reform process must have the primary goal of strengthening the Organization's capacities to promote social and economic development for all States, particularly the developing among them. At the same time, this promotion must be undertaken while addressing questions related to peacekeeping, human rights and humanitarian activities. It is on the basis of these essential criteria that we would wish to see the Organization reformed and revitalized and given an improved structure, a more democratic regime and a solid financial footing. If we do so, the United Nations will be able effectively to meet the new challenges of our times.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Worship of Haiti, His Excellency Mr. Fritz Longchamp.

Mr. Longchamp (Haiti) (*interpretation from French*): At the outset, I wish to convey the pleasure of the Haitian delegation at faithfully attending this great annual meeting, which always has a particular importance for us. It is yet another opportunity to participate in the discussions on the great questions before us and to seek better solutions in our quest to preserve international peace and security and promote economic and social progress.

The consideration of various subjects will certainly entail difficult debates, but Mr. Udovenko's long experience and solid understanding of international problems are sure guarantees for the successful outcome of our meetings. In congratulating him on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, I wish him every success in his guidance of our work.

I take this opportunity to express our gratitude to Ambassador Razali Ismail for the achievements of the fifty-first session.

To our new Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, I convey our satisfaction at the dynamism with which he has infused the Organization since he assumed office.

Three weeks ago, the wreck of a passenger boat, which killed more than 100 of my compatriots, threw the country into grief and the entire world into dismay. Messages of sympathy arrived from every corner, as did assistance that helped us to cope with this tragedy. On behalf of the Haitian people and Government, I wish to express our deep gratitude to the international community, which, yet again, has demonstrated great solidarity with my country.

For some time, the gist of statements made in this Organization about Haiti was a plea for the restoration of a state of law and an end to the violence and brutal authoritarianism. Today, I am pleased to convey the message that the Haitian people has been greatly relieved by the reestablishment of democratic institutions, assisted by the international community, and the United Nations in particular.

I wish to highlight some of the progress that has been made in the political sphere and the efforts exerted to consolidate the gains of the new democratic deal, whose rules of play are being increasingly respected. The transition of power has been recognized and accepted as a cardinal principle of political life. The state, quasi-state and civil institutions are being further strengthened. Socio-professional associations and pressure groups are playing an ever more active role.

In the field of human rights, no effort has been spared to end the repressive practices that characterized the former dictatorial regimes. Arbitrary arrests, summary executions and abuse have practically disappeared. The structures of oppression have been dismantled and replaced by institutions sensitive to the need to respect citizens' rights. This is the case with the National Police force that has replaced the Haitian Armed Forces, which were the main perpetrators of human rights violations in the country. Created barely two years ago, this Police force continues to acquire the experience necessary to carry out its responsibilities for keeping the peace and public safety. It is already gearing up to ensure security and stability throughout the country when the mandate of the United Nations Transition Mission in Haiti ends in late November.

The judiciary, for its part, has enjoyed special attention, given the desire for justice expressed by the populace. Parliament is currently considering a bill that will allow the necessary deep-rooted reforms to be undertaken to improve the administration of justice.

While the political situation in the country has stabilized, economic and social performance has lagged behind. The gaps created by the crisis of 1991-1994 have yet to be breached. Democratic institutions are up and working, it is true, but they remain fragile because certain needs of the public have yet to be fulfilled.

Nonetheless, efforts are being undertaken to revitalize the economy. For example, it has been decided to modernize public companies. Hence, the creation of the Council to Modernize Public Companies. Cooperation with Parliament has already led to the creation of legal instruments aimed at maximizing the potential of these companies to the great profit of users and the consumers of the goods and services they produce. Similarly, the fiscal and financial system is being reformed and trade liberalized. A bill on customs tariffs is currently under consideration by Parliament.

In order to invigorate national production, an agrarian reform programme has been launched that aims at bestowing ownership on the peasants of their means of production. It works on three levels: access to land, access to credit and availability of technical training. The Government believes that agrarian reform will facilitate the social integration of citizens who have long been marginalized.

This programme falls within an anti-poverty campaign led by the Government in order to assist the poorest sectors of society. As can well be imagined, the democratic process in Haiti is being pursued, but it remains fragile because of the precarious situation and the great poverty of the people. It is quite obvious that, if it is to be viable, it must be maintained, nurtured and supported by sustainable development.

The Heads of State and Government who met here during the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations two years ago committed themselves to enabling the Organization to carry out its mandate properly. Consequently, the Secretary-General is now proposing a programme of reforms to strengthen the role of the Organization and to give it a new impetus. We thank the Secretary-General for this initiative, to which we give our full support. This bold and innovative proposal will enable the Organization to become more effective and carry out its mission fully.

Some of the measures presented have drawn our particular attention. For example, there is the idea of regrouping the activities of the United Nations around five major themes: peace and security, economic and social development, development cooperation, humanitarian affairs and human rights. However, we must ensure that development issues, which are crucial for the majority of Members, are given the same attention as other themes — if not more. Any reform must give development the priority, resources and political commitment it deserves.

The question of Security Council reform, which is still being studied, is another matter on which we must make progress, given the Council's role in the maintenance of international peace and security. Haiti continues to call for more transparency and participation in the Council's work, so that the views of States which are not members of the Council are considered in the decision-making process. Any expansion of the Security Council should be carried out in a way that guarantees a fair and equal geographical representation. Everything

should be done so that the universality of the inhabitants of our planet is recognized in the United Nations system.

However timely they may be, reforms alone will not make the Organization more efficient if it does not have adequate financial resources to carry out its activities. We are convinced that the financial crisis of the United Nations may reduce its capacity to cope with the serious problems it faces.

We need a strong and efficient United Nations, capable of finding solutions to current problems and facing the challenges of the next century. It is through the orchestrated, collective action of the United Nations that we will be able to overcome our numerous current problems, which threaten international peace and security and compromise the well-being of our populations.

There we refer first to the many armed conflicts which are raging in all regions of the world, some of which seem to resist any attempt at a negotiated settlement. Haiti encourages the use of regional and multilateral mechanisms to solve these conflicts.

Likewise, the existence of vast arsenals of weapons of mass destruction is a grave threat to our collective security. The progress achieved in the area of disarmament — especially the opening for signature last year of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention — is encouraging. However, we urge the countries concerned to make further efforts to achieve complete and true disarmament.

The Republic of Haiti welcomes the recent adoption of the text of a treaty banning anti-personnel landmines. This is an important step in the battle to eliminate these deadly devices, which have caused so much suffering and which continue to take a toll among civilian populations, especially among women and children.

The illicit use of drugs and drug trafficking are also problems which the international community must face with determination. They are, in fact, a threat to the internal security of small States because of the violence and criminality with which they are often associated. Furthermore, drug use affects the most vulnerable stratum of society: young people. International cooperation is absolutely necessary to overcome this scourge.

Since 1960 several summits and conferences devoted to poverty and development have been organized. Recommendations have been formulated and measures have been contemplated. Nevertheless, poverty continues to gain ground. According to the 1997 *Human Development Report*, more than 1.5 billion of the planet's inhabitants live in a state of extreme poverty, particularly in African countries and less developed countries, which see themselves increasingly marginalized.

The eradication of poverty, especially in the least developed countries, should go beyond simple speeches or resolutions. It requires a strong political will, adequate resources, well defined strategies and the implementation of appropriate programmes. It also requires the sincere support of the international community, especially the support of international institutions and the leaders of the industrialized countries, namely, those who possess technology and wealth. The battle against poverty must also be a struggle for human dignity, sustainable development and peace.

With a view to strengthening international peace and security, the Republic of Haiti has pursued a policy of good neighbourliness which has enabled it to come closer to countries in the region. It has established with the Dominican Republic a mechanism for consultations through a joint Haitian-Dominican Commission. This is an excellent tool for cooperation and working together to find a solution to the various problems of the island. We would like to see this important forum continue, as it represents a necessary stage towards greater mutual understanding between the Haitian and Dominican peoples.

Likewise, Haiti recently rejoined the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). By getting the train of integration under way, my country intends to contribute in a significant manner to the realization of the objectives of the Community, because Haiti is aware that a strong, open-ended, united CARICOM will largely determine the socio-economic performance of the Caribbean region. In this context, we urge the international community to continue to support the reconstruction of Montserrat.

Fifty-two years ago at San Francisco we undertook to work for the progress and happiness of our peoples in a world where peace and security would reign. We should therefore work to realize their dreams and meet their expectations and aspirations.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): The next speaker is the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs

and Special Envoy of the President of Afghanistan, His Excellency Mr. Abdullah Abdullah.

Mr. Abdullah (Afghanistan): Let me impart at the outset the sad news I received early today of the aerial bombardment by the Taliban of the city of Mazar-i-Sharif, the sixteenth consecutive bombardment in just two days. These bombardments have taken as many as 150 lives among the civilian population of the city, mostly women and children. I express outrage and condemnation at this cowardly act of terror, which typifies the Taliban's gross violation of international humanitarian law and their relentless belligerence against every norm recognized by the world today.

I stand before the Assembly and the world community in the tradition of past Afghan representatives — with the exception of those during the years of occupation — representing an independent, sovereign and non-aligned Afghanistan.

One year ago, our Foreign Minister, the late Abdul Rahim Ghafoorzai, stood on this podium to explain the dark and ominous movement known as the Taliban, which — backed by foreign forces — had invaded Afghanistan. Tragically, Mr. Ghafoorzai died in the service of his nation. So today it is my duty to stand before the Assembly to explain the struggle the Afghan people have waged against these mercenaries.

When the Taliban entered Kabul on 27 September 1996 their first act was to storm the United Nations complex. The past 12 months have seen a seemingly endless series of edicts issued by the Taliban in areas of Afghanistan that they claim to control. Under those edicts, they have in fact imprisoned every woman and terrorized every man.

Their latest ignominious act has been to arrest Emma Bonino, the European Union Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs, her aides and a group of visiting international journalists, including CNN's Christiane Amanpour. Outraged by the Taliban's act, the German Foreign Minister, Mr. Klaus Kinkel, said that he considered it a slap in the face and an act of "cynical disregard for the entire European Union". The group was eventually released, but not before at least two of its members were beaten with the butt of a Kalashnikov rifle. Ms. Bonino told Reuters that the experience had given her a taste of what Afghans go through every day under the Taliban.

> "This is an example of what people here go through every day: in a situation of random terror." [*Reuters News Wire*, "EC commissioner released by Taleban," 29 September 1997]

An Afghan quoted in *The New York Times* of 24 September 1997 stated,

> "Most days I wake up thinking we'd all be better off dead than under these fanatics."

These are just a couple of facts to open a small window onto the gloom and despair facing our people.

As this terror continues in Afghanistan, we are here today to discuss the Afghan question, which is now an international issue.

As the crisis in Afghanistan continues to unfold, we must ask — and answer — important questions, questions to be answered particularly by those who, under the guise of neutrality, equate the aggressors with the victims of aggression. Those questions are: Who is following the rules of the civilized world? Whose actions warrant recognition? Who deserves to participate in civilized discussion at a global level?

On the battlefield, we continue, of course, to defend ourselves and our nation. In this imposed war, we are taking what we consider to be the moral high ground of negotiation and dialogue.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan — like many others in the world, including some prominent Pakistani politicians and commentators — still identifies Pakistani intervention and interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan as the root cause of the prolonged conflict and the subsequent suffering of our people.

Pakistan constantly alleges that the Taliban control two thirds of Afghanistan, including Kabul, where peace prevails. Mr. William Maley, the renowned Australian expert on Afghanistan, stated earlier in the year that the Taliban brought peace to Kabul in the same sense that Hitler brought peace to Warsaw.

On 7 August 1997, Mr. Gohar Ayub Khan, the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, said:

> "In Afghanistan ... the majority in the country is Pakhtoons, who are 60 per cent. The other groups,

including Uzbeks, Tajiks, Hazaras and Ismailis collectively, constitute about 40 per cent."

The Pakistani Foreign Minister is blatantly inventing fraudulent statistics to fuel the flames of ethnic hatred and conflict in Afghanistan and to justify Pakistani objectives. No valid statistics could claim that any ethnic group in Afghanistan — Pakhtoon, Tajik, Uzbek or other — constituted more than 37 per cent of the population. If Pakistan continues its irresponsible policy of perpetrating ethnic hatred in Afghanistan, a consequential escalation of "ethnic cleansing" will threaten the national unity of our country.

Pakistan maintains that it has no favourites in Afghanistan. The reality is that the Pakistani establishment has designated one group of Afghans to be the natural rulers over all the rest and conceivably to turn Afghanistan into a subservient protectorate State.

The reality was best expressed by Fred Halliday, an international affairs specialist at the London School of Economics, who wrote last November:

> "The capture by Taliban guerrillas of the Afghan capital, Kabul, however short- or long-lived, has come after two years of one of the most obnoxious interventions by one State in the affairs of another in many years. Reported in the West as an indigenous struggle, in fact Pakistan set up the Taliban as a semi-regular fighting force in 1994 ... providing them with ... guns, money, fuel and technical support ... Since its creation in 1947, Pakistan has harboured the goal of dominating its northern neighbour." [*The Nation*, "Kabul's Patriarchy with Guns", 11 November 1996, p. 19]

And, finally, the Pakistani Government, by proposing the dubious "vacant-seat" formula for Afghanistan, strives to expel from the United Nations a country that has been a member of this global body since before the birth of Pakistan.

My delegation is grateful to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for having summarized the tragic situation in Afghanistan in his address to the fifty-second session of the General Assembly on 22 September 1997.

According to General Assembly resolution 51/195 B, which was adopted unanimously on 17 December 1996, and fully supported by the Islamic State of Afghanistan, the Assembly is

> "Strongly committed to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan". [*resolution 51/195 B*, seventh preambular paragraph]

The General Assembly also stressed

> "the importance of non-intervention and non-interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan". [*ibid.*, sixteenth preambular paragraph]

Unfortunately, since last year the supply of weapons and ammunition from abroad has massively increased and constitutes a very important programme of action by the powerful Pakistani intelligence service, Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI).

The situation has also worsened with regard to what the resolution called

> "actions undermining the security of State frontiers, including the growing illicit traffic in arms and narcotics by criminal elements and groups from [Taliban occupied] areas of Afghanistan and ... the use of [occupied] Afghan territory for the training and harbouring of terrorists". [*ibid.*, eighteenth preambular paragraph]

It is amazing that some of the countries that consider terrorism a threat to peace should nonetheless — while claiming impartiality — favour the rejectionist Taliban by equating them with the Government of the Islamic State of Afghanistan, which shares the mounting concerns of the General Assembly in this matter.

With regard to the peace process, we share the view that

> "the main responsibility for finding a political solution to the conflict lies with the Afghan parties". [*ibid.*, paragraph 2]

The Taliban, however, favoured, encouraged and assisted by the cross-border political and military support, consider their only responsibility to be the waging of an aggressive war aimed at conquering the whole of Afghan territory by crushing all resistance movements.

The Taliban's intransigence and disregard for United Nations General Assembly and Security Council resolutions calling for a peaceful settlement of the Afghan problem are a fact well known to the international

community. The report of the Secretary-General dated 16 March 1997 indicates that:

> "The Taliban, judging both from their words and from their activities on the ground, appear determined to gain military and political control of the whole of Afghanistan and to establish their vision of an Islamic State". [*A/51/838*, paragraph 7]

The Secretary-General's report (A/51/929) of 16 June 1997 equally illustrates Taliban's choice of the military option and its intention to overrun the country by force. This utterly bellicose position of the Taliban, while prolonging the suffering of the Afghan people is aggravating the concerns of the countries in the region, which views it as a serious threat to the region's peace and security. It is worth mentioning that the Taliban's aggressive attitude is encouraged by military intelligence services of neighbouring Pakistan, which still hopes to install a puppet regime in Kabul, subservient to its expansionist and hegemonic desires. The dull-minded interventionists should read the history of Afghanistan once again and learn from the defeat of previous aggressors in this homeland of dauntless and courageous people.

We are fully aware

> "that a cessation of armed hostilities ... and political stability are indispensable if reconstruction measures are to have a lasting effect". *(Resolution 51/195 A, eighth preambular paragraph)*

The Taliban have expressed no interest in the urgently needed reconstruction of the country. In fact, starvation by blockade is their favourite weapon against Afghans.

We express our full

> "support for the continuing efforts of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan" *(Resolution 51/195 B, thirteenth preambular paragraph)*

led by Mr. Norbert Holl, and the special assignment on 30 July 1997 of Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi as Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to assess the situation and the role of the United Nations in Afghanistan.

We reaffirm the full support of our Government for the

> "activities of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan, in facilitating ... in cooperation with [neighbouring and] interested States and international organizations, the political process towards the goals of national reconciliation and a lasting political settlement with the participation of all parties to the conflict". *(ibid.,* paragraph 5)

Because of the shortage of time, I am omitting some paragraphs from my prepared text.

The Taliban have refused to negotiate any political settlement and have insisted on a unilateral military solution.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan honours

> "its commitments regarding the safety and full freedom of movement of United Nations personnel, in particular the personnel of the United Nations Special Mission, as well as the security of their premises in Afghanistan." *(ibid.,* paragraph 7)

Recently, however, as a result of the disturbances brought about on 14 September 1997 by Taliban infiltration, the premises belonging to international aid agencies and non-governmental organizations in the city of Mazar-i-Sharif were plundered. This city was previously a haven of peace and security. The Islamic State of Afghanistan remains committed to the safety of the United Nations personnel and the personnel of other aid agencies in Afghanistan.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan, in the light of the mounting needs of the Afghan people, appeals to all donor agencies not to abandon Afghanistan, particularly in the face of the upcoming harsh winter.

Security Council document S/1997/588 of 25 July 1997 explains the Islamic State of Afghanistan's agreement to a Declaration of the United National and Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan, the foundation for an enlarged body representing all ethnic groups from all over Afghanistan. The Declaration addresses an appeal in favour of the peace process to the Taliban and the Pakistani Government.

We favour

> "An immediate and durable ceasefire among the Afghan parties, to be supervised by a commission composed of representatives of all the warring parties, facilitated by the United Nations". *(ibid.,* paragraph 8)

One of the most important elements in the General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on Afghanistan is the call for

> "demilitarization of Kabul, with adequate safeguards to ensure security and public order". *(ibid.)*

The Islamic State of Afghanistan considers this point to be very important. It could constitute a credible precedent that could be applied in the future in other parts of the country.

The

> "establishment of a broad-based and fully representative authoritative council" *(ibid.)*

as required by the General Assembly resolution, will be feasible if the appeal of the United Front inviting the Taliban to join the Front is heard. The Islamic State of Afghanistan, in this regard, extends its full cooperation to the United Nations. It is imperative to secure the agreement of the Taliban with the United Nations and to ensure its full cooperation with such a broad-based authoritative council.

We are ready to cooperate for the creation of

> "a national security force to provide for security throughout the country and oversee the demobilization of all the warring parties through the collection and safeguarding of all heavy weapons in the country, and to stop the flow of arms and of equipment related to arms production to the parties". *(ibid.)*

We are grateful to the leaders and Governments of the central Asian republics of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan for their respective proposed peace initiatives, as well as to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Apart from supplementing each other, these initiatives may be coordinated so as to lead to the convening of useful negotiations with a specific agenda under the auspices of the United Nations. The proposals, however, thus far have not been accepted by the Taliban.

The General Assembly deplored

> "the civilian casualties inflicted by the indiscriminate use of landmines." *(ibid.,* paragraph 11)

The Taliban have recently spread landmines in and around the northern city of Kunduz. This is only one example of Taliban mass use of landmines.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan shares the General Assembly's deep concern over and denunciation of

> "the discrimination against women and girls and other recurring abuses of human rights in Afghanistan ... emphasizing the importance of democracy and of the realization of human rights in any future political process in Afghanistan". *(ibid.,* ninth preambular paragraph)

Mr. Lloyd Axworthy, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada, said in his statement of 25 September in this Assembly:

> "Canadian women, appalled at the treatment of their sisters in Afghanistan, have started a letter-writing campaign. I will be delivering some 5,000 letters today to the Secretary-General, which call on him to take the lead in exposing the gross human rights violations of women in Afghanistan as unacceptable in the eyes of the world's citizens." [See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Plenary Meetings*, 12th meeting]

We draw the attention of the General Assembly to the recent document (A/52/384) containing the Declaration of Principles made by the United Islamic and National Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan, adopted on 20 September 1997 by the Islamic State of Afghanistan. The Declaration, systematizing a political framework for the country, contains the following principles: first, the principle of Islam; secondly, the principle of independence and international cooperation; thirdly, the principles of democracy and pluralism; fourthly, the principles of election and delegation of authority to local administration; and, fifthly, the principle of human rights.

The General Assembly last year called on

> "all States strictly to refrain from any outside interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, including the involvement of foreign military personnel". *(Resolution 51/195 B,* paragraph 15)

Regarding the involvement of Pakistani military personnel in Afghanistan, the Government of the Islamic State of Afghanistan has transmitted amply documented information to the United Nations.

The book, entitled *The Not-So-Hidden Hand* — produced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the

Islamic State of Afghanistan — has been distributed to the members of the Security Council, some other interested countries and the Secretariat of the United Nations. This book — I will not go through it; it is a big book — documents directly and proves the physical presence of Pakistani paramilitary and military personnel inside Afghanistan, fighting alongside the Taliban against the Islamic State of Afghanistan.

The book includes, first, identification photos of each Pakistani captive, prisoner registration forms with detailed descriptions, fingerprints and other data pertaining to each; secondly, identification cards taken from some prisoners that illustrate their membership in extremist Pakistani organizations responsible for terrorist acts in South Asia, such as Anjuman-i-Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan; and thirdly, correspondence from most of the prisoners to their families in Pakistan, written mostly in Urdu — the official Pakistani language, which is not spoken in Afghanistan.

I should like to remind the Assembly that on 3 July 1997 Mr. Francis Okelo, the Deputy Head of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan, together with a United Nations military adviser, paid a visit to Maimana prison in northern Afghanistan and verified the physical presence of Pakistani military prisoners in the prison. And *The News* of 6 September 1997 — printed in Islamabad — contains an article entitled "Pakistanis in Masood's captivity plead for release".

The General Assembly called upon all States immediately to end the supply of arms, ammunition, military equipment, training or any other military support to all parties to the conflict in Afghanistan. Furthermore, document A/52/403, dated 29 September 1997, confirms the recent dispatch of some 600 additional military personnel and that shipments of arms from Pakistan to Afghanistan have significantly increased.

The General Assembly has reiterated that the continuation of the conflict in Afghanistan provides a fertile ground for terrorism and drug trafficking, which destabilize the region and beyond. The United Nations Information Service reported on 11 September 1997 a rise in opium-poppy production in Afghanistan to 2,800 metric tons in 1997, an estimated 25 per cent increase over 1996. Mr. Derek Fatchett, a Minister in Britain's Foreign Office, pointed out in *The Guardian* of 25 June 1997 that the Taliban war chest is financed by drug money. Furthermore, 96.4 per cent of Afghanistan's total opium production originates in provinces currently under Taliban control, according to the United Nations Information Service report.

Afghanistan, as a State party to the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 23 November 1972, has recognized its primary duty to ensure the identification, protection, conservation, preservation and transmission to future generations of, *inter alia*, the cultural heritage situated in the country. The General Assembly has called upon all Afghan parties to take appropriate steps to prohibit, prevent and, if necessary, put a stop to any form of theft, pillage or misappropriation of and any acts of vandalism directed against, cultural property of the Afghan nation. The Taliban, however, on 17 April 1997, out of fanaticism expressed its intention to demolish the two largest statues of Buddha in the world. In spite of great concern by the Secretary-General and Mr. Federico Mayor, Director of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and many Buddhist leaders throughout the world, the Taliban did not exhibit any change of attitude. Fortunately, its military push was repulsed and the colossal statues remain intact.

In this context, reference should be made to the ancient artifacts plundered from the rich Kabul National Museum. According to Pakistani press reports, the artifacts have been added to the personal collections of the former Pakistani Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, and the former Minister of the Interior, Nasirullah Babar. On behalf of the people of Afghanistan, I call upon the Pakistanis to return these irreplaceable Afghan artifacts, which are also part of the world's cultural heritage. I urge UNESCO to investigate the matter.

I should like to announce that the delegation of the Islamic State of Afghanistan, together with some other countries of the third world, will co-sponsor the draft resolution entitled "Towards a culture of peace," submitted under agenda item 156. My delegation also supports the resolution of the Economic and Social Council adopted in Geneva entitled "Proclamation of the Year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace".

We want to establish the best fraternal relations with Pakistan and other neighbouring countries. Afghanistan's pivotal location places it, as always, at the crossroads of different corners of Asia. Naturally, no regional economic cooperation — in the context of the transit of goods, petroleum and natural gas — can succeed without a peaceful Afghanistan enjoying administrative unity.

Afghanistan must cease to exist as a country of confrontation, discord and clashes. Rather, it must turn into a land of interrelation, association, joint action and cooperation. This is the genuine desire of all patriotic Afghans and of the true friends of Afghanistan.

Fifty-two years ago, the United Nations was founded on the paramount ideals of a safer world and on parameters of global peace and collective security. The Foreign Minister of Italy, His Excellency Mr. Lamberto Dini, said in his speech last week before the General Assembly:

> "We no longer live in a world of purely national interests. More and more, policy-making is informed by global concerns such as human rights, solidarity and social justice. At the threshold of the twenty-first century, let us pledge to settle religious and ethnic conflicts through dialogue, tolerance and cultural exchange, and to find collective answers to international terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking and the degradation of the environment." [See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Plenary Meetings*, 11th meeting]

Let me from this rostrum remind all of us here, as the general debate draws to a close, that we must ask ourselves about the level of our commitment to the implementation of the ideals I have mentioned.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): I call on Mr. Pierre Osho, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Benin.

Mr. Osho (Benin) (*interpretation from French*): As I take the floor on behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Benin, I would like first to associate myself with the words of congratulations and deep appreciation expressed to Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko by previous speakers. They spoke so eloquently that I will confine myself to saying how hopeful I am that this session will benefit from his proven competence and his remarkable analytical mind in order to draw from our debates constructive conclusions that preserve a just balance between the different suggestions and recommendations contained in the various statements.

The particular significance and nature of this session do not reside only in the impressive gathering of leaders from 185 Member States. That has long been customary, and has even become ritual, during this period every year since the establishment of the United Nations in 1945. What confers on this fifty-second session a distinctive character, and what promises it an excellent place in the annals of the United Nations, is the central focus of its agenda, which, as we all know, is devoted to structural reform.

What is our assessment of the specific reform provisions that are to be discussed and decided upon in the course of these meetings? What are the ins and outs of reform, the issues at stake and the real objectives? Are the reforms capable of giving the Organization the means for productive and effective action to meet the complex problems and numerous challenges on the horizon of the next millennium, whose effects are already strongly felt in the everyday realities of today's world?

These are a few of the major concerns of countries, such as mine, that are today experiencing both hope and doubt: hope based on the enormous potential of our Earth, whose intelligent, rational and well-directed use should make it possible to ensure the progress, prosperity and development to which all peoples legitimately aspire; but also doubt, a feeling of stubborn and profound uncertainty constantly fuelled by misery and poverty, ignorance and disease, technological lags, and the economic backwardness that over 1.5 billion human beings suffer from.

Since his election in January 1997 our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, has resolutely tackled, with commendable diligence, strength and motivation, the preparation of a programme for reform, which he himself rightly describes as

> "the most extensive and far-reaching reforms in the fifty-two year history of this Organization." (*A/51/950*, Letter of Transmittal, first paragraph)

It is reform aimed at giving the United Nations

> "the ways in which the United Nations can more effectively and efficiently meet the challenges that lie ahead as we enter a new century, and a new millennium". (*ibid.*)

We regard as appropriate the global approach taken by the Secretary-General, his view of general and sectoral problems, the thrust of the measures and solutions he advocates, in accordance with a methodology that combines pragmatism and the need for democratic and more effective functioning. Therefore, the delegation of Benin is in favour of the bulk of the proposals in the report.

Nonetheless, I must draw attention to the following considerations to which my country attaches great importance.

First, Benin believes that it would not be appropriate to eliminate the Committee for Development Planning, which is, *inter alia*, entrusted with developing the performance criteria for the least developed countries. We believe that rather than having it replaced by groups of experts created by the Economic and Social Council we should consider purely and simply retaining the Committee.

Secondly, since the situation in Africa is one of the priorities on which the Secretary-General would like to focus in the next five years. My country would hope that the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and Least Developed Countries might be strengthened in terms of human and financial resources in order to be better able to play a full role within the United Nations system.

Thirdly, although on 20 June 1997, following over three years of negotiations, the General Assembly adopted the Agenda for Development, it is regrettable that the Secretary-General's reform programme made no mention or explicit reference to mechanisms and means for implementation and assessment of the Agenda. My delegation hopes that this question will be taken into account in the framework of measures envisaged in order to bring about the renewal of the Organization.

Lastly, I would like to anticipate the results of our session by saying that, both individually and collectively, we must firmly commit ourselves to implement the decisions and measures that will be taken in the framework of this long-awaited reform.

Our consensus will be not a triumph for the ideas of one State or group of States over another, but, rather, the fruitful result of a shared political resolve to adapt our universal Organization to the changes and developments of this end of the century period.

Here, and with specific reference to reform of the Security Council, Benin strongly recommends that the following principles should be taken into account: an increase in the membership of the Security Council truly reflecting the political and economic configuration of today's world; equitable geographical representation of the five regional groups, with the African group entitled to four seats, two permanent and two non-permanent; and protection of democratic and transparent functioning, ultimately involving the elimination of the right of veto.

By formulating the 15 priority objectives of his reform programme as a series of profound changes of major scope which should enable the United Nations to embark resolutely on a course of radical reform, the Secretary-General produced a document of undeniably high quality, whose title — "Renewing the United Nations" — is significant in more than one respect.

Given the noble and legitimate aspirations of the entire international community for the future of the planet, the Organization certainly needs to be renewed in order to confront effectively and successfully the exciting yet disturbing challenges posed by globalization. Renewing the United Nations requires a new vision of the world, new conceptions and approaches to partnership among nations, and new methods for the Organization and for handling relations among States in a new world. That is the real problem. Those are the real stakes at a time when we are inexorably approaching a new millennium. Globalization is both a phenomenon and a process; it has become the recurrent and omnipresent theme of all debates and of all concerns.

Like other members, I noted with particular interest that President Clinton — first at the Waldorf Astoria hotel on the evening of 21 September, then the following day in this Hall — forcefully and germanely stressed the need for the United Nations to ensure that the globalization of the economy does not create deep disparities between rich and poor and that it establishes innovative partnerships between the private sector, non-governmental organizations and international financial institutions.

As the representative of a least developed country, Benin, I cannot but welcome this great and noble idea, imbued with generosity, pragmatism and a spirit of solidarity. But, looking the facts in the face, what do we see?

When on 18 December 1991 the General Assembly adopted the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s, it created a new political covenant, one of whose vital features was the principle of shared responsibility and the international community's full and complete involvement with Africa with a view to achieving development objectives including a real growth rate of at least 6 per cent per annum in gross domestic product, and a minimum net total of $30 billion in official development assistance for 1992, with an annual increase averaging 4 per cent beginning in 1993.

Today, six years after the adoption of the New Agenda, in spite of all the efforts of African countries to make better use of official development assistance, and in spite of the express intention of a number of developed countries to support the development of Africa, the total volume of official development assistance to Africa has declined considerably: by about one third compared with the forecast of $30 billion.

It was in this context of the decline in official development assistance that the famous United Nations System-wide Special Initiative for Africa was launched in March 1996 in order to lend fresh momentum to the New Agenda. But it is obvious that this great initiative can be successful only with the support of the international community, through a massive mobilization of financial resources to carry out the programmes and projects that have been set up. While, to be sure, it is first and foremost up to the African countries to make the greater part of the effort, the excessively restrictive procedures and conditionalities for the granting of loans, and the lukewarm reaction of certain creditors to the idea of simply cancelling the foreign debt of poor countries, are obstacles to the effective mobilization of the expected financial resources.

In a publication issued at Washington just a few months ago, in May 1997, the International Monetary Fund defined globalization as

> "the growing economic interdependence of the entire world caused by an increase in the volume and variety of transborder transactions in goods and services, and in international capital flows, along with the rapid and broad dissemination of modern technology".

Welcomed by some, feared by others, globalization has become an unavoidable economic reality for all nations. For most experts and other analysts, this process marks the success of the global spread of an economic liberalization that began in Europe half a century ago with the Marshall Plan. In their view, it brings unprecedented possibilities to billions of people all over the world.

For us in Africa, that optimistic vision needs to be tempered, for possibilities are not realities. So that it can become a reality, the harmonious pursuit of the globalization process, in the context of real development for all those billions of people throughout the world, especially in Africa, necessarily presupposes a new international programme of solidarity and cooperation for the poor countries, without which globalization will very soon transform their regions into a poor and marginalized periphery of a hyper-rich and hyper-developed world.

In fact, the developed countries are already doing a great deal for Africa, if we consider the sum total of the loans made to the continent through bilateral and multilateral assistance. And yet, contrary to what statistics, curves, graphs and growth rates would have us believe, African populations have not yet felt any tangible improvement of their standard of living in their daily lives. In spite of all this, for the immense majority of Africans the will to survive is stronger than despair, and hope prevails over resignation.

The ministerial meeting of the Security Council devoted to Africa, held on the commendable initiative of the United States last 25 September, led to a fruitful exchange of views that showed us a real will on the part of the international community to become more actively, more significantly and more concretely involved in a new type of partnership with Africa in order to contribute to its development.

The signs of this real readiness on the part of the developed countries have proliferated in recent years, as we can see, *inter alia*, from the resolutions of the G-7 adopted in Lyon and in Denver, assistance programmes of the eighth European Development Fund, President Clinton's initiative for a partnership for economic growth and opportunity and the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD I), and so on.

All in all, it can be said that the will exists to help Africa emerge from poverty and underdevelopment, that concrete actions are being undertaken in this direction and that new commitments are being made. Nevertheless, there still remain, unfortunately, enormous problems, and Africa continues to present to the world the desolate spectacle of endemic poverty, aggravated by crises and fratricidal conflicts.

In order to put an end to this distressing situation, Africa's development partners should envisage a comprehensive and integrated mechanism for flexible, operational and effective financing, free of bureaucratic impediments and red tape, with the aim of establishing a centralized funding entity to receive resources from all sources to be devoted to economic and social development.

The end of the cold war, the process of economic globalization and the progressive realization of the

concept of sustainable development offer the opportunity for profound change, calling into question some of the traditional solutions and conventional answers to development problems.

In the dark centuries of the slave trade, Africa contributed blood, sweat and the toil of its strongest arms to the building of the bases of the economy of the New World. The collective memory of humankind must not forget this important historical fact. Today the developed countries have the moral duty to be as concerned as Africans themselves about the destiny of Africa, not to abandon Africa along the roadside of globalization and to make available to it part of their enormous material, technological and financial strength, in order to support Africa's efforts in the struggle to emerge from underdevelopment and to enter the modern age.

In order that the implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF), the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, Agenda 21 and other programmes of action can be truly successful, it will be necessary to establish a global system of operations and financing for Africa, like the Marshall Plan, which contributed greatly to the reconstruction and economic and social recovery of Europe after the Second World War. The establishment of this mechanism before the year 2000 will make it possible for Africa to stride confidently, not slouch, into the twenty-first century.

Shortly before the statement that was made on 5 June 1947 at Harvard University by General George Marshall to define the foundations of his well-known European Recovery Programme, President Harry Truman stated:

> "Our duty is to help free peoples to fashion their own destiny in their own way. I believe that our assistance must be first of all economic and financial, because this is essential to economic stability and political order."

Fifty years later, this magnificent and noble spirit of solidarity, displayed voluntarily by the great American people and its Government, still retains all its validity and all its historical meaning.

There are cases in which, because of the requirements of its own unfolding, history repeats itself. Here at the end of a century, we are experiencing one such case: it is necessary to meet the urgent need for a new Marshall Plan for Africa. And the upcoming second Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD II) could provide one of the best opportunities to do so.

If the international community works resolutely in this direction, we will have laid the solid and indestructible foundations for a road on which we will all be able to march triumphantly into the third millennium.

For its part the Government of Benin, while awaiting the fulfilment of that hope, has developed the concept of a shared social minimum level in order methodically and effectively to take actions and measures aimed at eliminating poverty, hunger, disease and illiteracy, providing adequate housing, guaranteeing productive employment, improving standards and conditions of living and ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources. This concept was the subject of an international symposium, supported by the United Nations system, which was held in Cotonou from 4 to 6 August 1997.

The consolidation of our process of democratic renewal, which began after the historic National Conference of the Active Forces of the Nation in February 1990, necessitates immediate and short-term social and economic successes. That is why we are endeavouring, with our limited resources, to take multifaceted actions to improve the living and working conditions of our rural and urban populations. However, we know that we can rely on international cooperation, founded not only on solidarity, but on mutual interest and partnership, to overcome the difficulties confronting us, to support our efforts at economic and social recovery, to build a State genuinely based on the rule of law and to construct a free, democratic, modern and prosperous nation.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): I shall now call on the representative of Canada, who wishes to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Duval (Canada) (*interpretation from French*): I should like to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for his statement this morning, and especially for his favourable reference to the Ottawa process and the global efforts to prevent

the production and use of anti-personnel landmines. However, I should like to clarify one issue with regard to the Minister's statement that some members of the Security Council refused to support the idea of a temporary multinational force, led by Canada, in response to the humanitarian crisis raging in what was then called eastern Zaire. It is important to recall that the mandate of the multinational force in question was adopted unanimously by the Security Council as resolution 1080 (1996) on 15 November 1996.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): I call on the representative of Pakistan, who wishes to speak on a point of order.

Mr. Islam (Pakistan): The gentleman styling himself as the representative of Afghanistan made a number of objectionable references about Pakistan in his statement this afternoon. My delegation would like to reserve the right of reply, and will exercise it at a later stage.

The meeting rose at 6.25 p.m.

United Nations A/52/PV.21

General Assembly
Fifty-second Session

Official Records

21st plenary meeting
Thursday, 2 October 1997, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Udovenko . . . . . (Ukraine)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: The first speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr Al-Thani.

Sheikh Al-Thani (Qatar) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session. I am confident that your political experience will help you conduct the work of the session wisely and successfully.

I should also like to commend your predecessor, His Excellency Ambassador Razali Ismail of Malaysia, for the excellent way in which he presided over the General Assembly at its fifty-first session.

I also wish to extend our congratulations to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, on his election to his current position, and to express our appreciation for his programme for the reform of the Organization. He can be assured of our full support for any measures he takes to that end.

As we approach a new millennium, the world is witnessing a series of internal and external conflicts that represent a great regression when compared to the optimistic expectations that followed the end of the cold war and the collapse of ideological conflicts. A new world characterized by balance and equitable relations among States was expected to emerge, with a view to the creation of innovative cooperation among our States and peoples in different areas of concern. However, I regret to say that the world is still facing severe problems, such as political conflict, poverty, famine and intensive migratory movements. These are the result of poor economic conditions, refugee flows caused by wars, the deterioration of the environment, trafficking in illicit drugs and the proliferation of organized crime.

In the context of these changes, and more than half a century after the United Nations was established, there is an urgent need for the Organization to undergo drastic reforms, both structural and functional, so as to establish rules and principles for a new international order free of double standards. Such a new order would allow us to rise to the new challenges and achieve the goals set forth in the Charter more than 50 years ago for the maintenance of international peace and security and the intensification of international cooperation for the benefit of the peoples of the world.

To this end, the process of reform must begin by activating the role of the General Assembly and enabling it to fulfil its duty in an effective manner that would give its democratic resolutions vitality and credibility before international public opinion. The Security Council must also be reformed, so that it can carry out the role it has been entrusted with, because it has a special status among

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the United Nations bodies, as defined in the Charter. In our view, this cannot be achieved except through a general agreement that would regulate the use of the veto power, limiting such use to cases covered by Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, namely, threats to international peace.

In order for the Security Council to reflect the new political and economic realities of a changing world, it must increase the number of its non-permanent members to provide for just and balanced representation and to enable the Council to deal with the new international realities and shoulder its responsibilities by becoming more democratic through the adoption of a rotation system, not limiting membership to certain States, and by giving all States the opportunity to participate in its work and assume their share of international responsibility.

Although we understand the opinions advocating an increase in the number of permanent members, we believe that the coexistence of permanent members that have the power of veto with permanent members that do not, plus non-permanent members, runs counter to the concepts of equality among States, geographic and cultural representation and international participation. It also runs counter to the principle of democratic decision-making. In order to achieve the required balance, fairness, justice, equality and reason call for an increase in Security Council membership for Asia, Africa and Latin America. Together, those three continents have the majority of world population and States. Nevertheless, their representation on the Security Council is less than 50 per cent. In order for the Secretary-General to be able to carry out the reforms that fall within his competence, the financial crisis of the United Nations must be addressed by making Member States honour their legal commitments and pay their dues without delay. In this regard, we would like to express our deep gratitude to Mr. Ted Turner for his generous donation to some United Nations humanitarian programmes. We hope this will be an encouraging initiative for others to follow.

The task of maintaining international peace and security has particular importance. Therefore, measures recommended by the General Assembly or taken by the Security Council should not be limited to post-conflict or war situations. More attention should be given to appropriate and timely preventive measures, because we believe that early measures adopted by the international community are the ideal way to avert the outbreak of conflicts and wars and to avoid taking the necessary political and military measures in the aftermath of the conflict — let alone imposing half solutions that are often unfair.

The question of disarmament plays an essential role in building the foundation of international peace and security. To achieve this goal, we believe that renewing the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) indefinitely is a decision that requires more support and endorsement, so that the Treaty can acquire a universal character, with the adherence of all States. In this context, the State of Qatar affirms that Israel should adhere to that Treaty and should place its nuclear facilities under the International Atomic Energy Agency's safeguards regime. This will be a basic step towards establishing a zone free from nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. It would also contribute to achieving equitable and balanced peace and stability in that important area of the world so that there would be no multiple criteria for defining the conduct of States.

In the same context, we cannot fail to mention the special importance of the Convention to ban anti-personnel mines, which was finalized in Oslo recently. It will be ready for signature in Ottawa next December. We hope it will be signed by all States.

The world has witnessed fundamental economic changes, such as the end of State control of economic life in many States, the withering away of numerous restraints on international trade, the easy transfer of capital and huge investments across the world. Meanwhile, many economies in developing countries are still deteriorating. This requires that urgent and effective solutions be provided by the international community to enable those States to progress and develop their societies through building strong and effective economies. Such an endeavour requires us to take a new look at expenditures on armaments, in order to save such huge sums and allocate them to supporting education and health programmes. This would also enable us to address the problems of poverty and the environment and to develop the economies of developing nations. This is an absolute necessity for any new international economic order based on integration and balance, and is capable of devising desired solutions for the aforementioned problems. The problems of poverty, backwardness and lack of access to education and medical care are among the problems that affect developing countries. The societies of such States also suffer from a population explosion that is disproportionate to their resources. At the same time, fortunes are being wasted on armaments, arms races or

luxuries. This causes huge discrepancies in consumption rates between the peoples of rich countries and those of poor countries.

Such problems compel us to be fully aware of the fact that solving them requires reconsidering the question of military expenditures. It is no secret to anybody in authority that while the programmes implemented by the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Food Programme cost less than $4.6 billion a year, Governments all over the world are spending about $800 billion every year on armaments, while 1.3 billion people are still living in a state of abject poverty.

Now I would like to address the situation in the Middle East and the crisis of the peace process.

The Israeli Government is still stalling in the implementation of agreements and putting impediments and obstacles in the way of achieving a just and comprehensive peace. Israel is undermining the peace process by building settlements, reneging on agreements and commitments reached with the Palestinian Authority, imposing a blockade on the Palestinian people, depriving them of their rights and flouting international legality. This generates violence and counter-violence. The Israeli policy runs counter to General Assembly resolutions and Security Council resolutions, especially resolutions 242 (1967), 271 (1969), 298 (1971), 478 (1980) and 672 (1990). They all provide that all legislative and administrative measures taken by Israel aimed at altering the legal status and demographic composition of the occupied Arab territories, including the city of Jerusalem, are null and void, and have no legal relevance. They also run counter to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 concerning the protection of civilians and their properties in time of war. Therefore, the international community is called upon to exert pressure on the Israeli Government to make it desist immediately from implementing the policies that jeopardize the peace process as a whole.

The Arab leaders affirmed last year at the Cairo summit that peace in the Middle East is a strategic option. They underlined the importance of having all the parties committed to the Madrid formula that calls for a peace based on the principle of land for peace. This means that Israel should withdraw completely from all the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including East Jerusalem, to enable the Palestinian people to establish their independent State, with Arab Jerusalem as its capital. It should also withdraw completely from the Syrian Golan and from southern Lebanon to the internationally recognized borders, in keeping with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

There has been a noticeable improvement over the last five years on the road to achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. It started with the Madrid Conference and moved on to Oslo and the subsequent peace accords. Several economic conferences were held to promote the Middle East peace process and to contribute to moving it forward by underscoring the common interests of the peoples of the region.

To that effect, arrangements are being made to hold a fourth economic summit conference for the Middle East and North Africa next November in Doha, the capital of my country. In this connection, I would emphasize that the State of Qatar has no private interest in acting as host for this conference. Our interest in holding it is based on the following reasons.

First, we believe that peace is a strategic choice that the Arab countries have adopted since the Madrid Conference.

Secondly, such a conference would manifest our desire for the peace process to continue. Failure of the peace process would have serious implications and would threaten peace both at the regional and at the international level.

Thirdly, our region has witnessed many wars in past years, the last of which was the 1991 Gulf War, which have impeded economic and political progress in our region and imposed on us huge expenditures on armaments at the expense of the social development and well-being of our peoples.

Fourthly, at the 1995 Amman Economic Summit the State of Qatar committed itself to acting as host to the fourth summit conference, and honouring that commitment is a question of our credibility as a State that respects its commitments.

Some are of the opinion that the conference should be cancelled due to current Israeli policy that does not respect undertakings and agreements, flouts international legality and tries to marginalize the role of the United Nations. Although we in Qatar understand the reasons behind such an opinion, which calls for the cancellation of the conference in response to the practices of the Israeli Government, which has not respected its

international commitments, we do respect our international commitments, and we believe that no State should have veto power with regard to the peace process. We have therefore decided to act as host to the conference on its appointed date. If it does not prove to be successful and fails to achieve the desired results, the Government of Israel will bear sole responsibility.

The State of Qatar welcomes the position of the United States of America, as expressed by its Secretary of State during our meeting in Saudi Arabia and here in New York. We also welcome the resolve it has shown in dealing with the disruption of the peace process in the Middle East, as well as the fact that it has underlined the principle of land for peace, the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the inadmissibility of taking unilateral measures that run counter to the peace process.

My country also appreciates the position of the States of the European Union, as well as the Russian Federation for their support of the peace process in the Middle East.

The State of Qatar views with satisfaction and appreciation the positions taken by States that support the Middle East peace process and reject the Israeli settlement policies that are obstructing that process. At the same time, my country stresses the importance of the role of the United Nations in the Middle East peace process and opposes any attempts to exclude it.

The State of Qatar joins the other fraternal members of the Gulf Cooperation Council in their endeavour to promote security and stability in the Gulf region, which is of strategic and vital importance to the entire world. The State of Qatar is making a constructive effort in that context with the aim of establishing good and constructive relations with all countries of the region on the basis of good-neighbourliness, mutual respect, non-intervention in the internal affairs of others, respect for international legality and the settlement of disputes through peaceful means, dialogue and mediation or by arbitration under international law. The State of Qatar supports the settlement of the dispute between the United Arab Emirates and the Islamic Republic of Iran over the three islands of Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunb by those means.

My Government and people have expressed their fraternal feelings and strong empathy towards the brotherly people of Iraq, who are living in extremely difficult circumstances resulting from the sanctions imposed on them. We have therefore welcomed the oil-for-food agreement between the United Nations and Iraq to alleviate the suffering of the fraternal people of Iraq and to provide them with such basic necessities as food and medicine. My Government has also emphasized the importance of respecting Iraq's sovereignty, territorial integrity and regional security. We condemn any foreign interference in its internal affairs. In the same context, my Government affirms the importance of implementation by the Government of Iraq of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, in particular those concerning the release of Kuwaiti prisoners and detainees and other nationals in the same conditions. Such steps would help the international community to lift the embargo imposed on Iraq and would also enable Iraq to carry out a constructive role in achieving security, stability and rehabilitation in the region.

My Government also expresses its concern for the suffering to which the brotherly people of Libya are being subjected due to the sanctions imposed against that country because of the Lockerbie issue. In that connection, the State of Qatar calls for the creation of a uniform and agreed regime for imposing sanctions and of mechanisms to lift them subsequently in a manner that does not distinguish among States and peoples and that strikes a balance between international interests, on the one hand, and the suffering to which peoples are subjected, on the other.

Last week the Security Council devoted a meeting to addressing the problems of disputes and wars in some African countries. It considered ways of containing and solving such problems. The State of Qatar, which has fraternal relations with the African countries, is pained to witness the current state of affairs in States such as the Sudan, Somalia, the Comoros, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and the Congo. We believe that the African States are capable of overcoming their plight if they receive the necessary international support, particularly for the purpose of improving their economies and the transfer of technology in an international partnership in which all would participate.

My country was one of the first to welcome the Dayton Peace Agreement because we believe in the importance of peace and cooperation in the Balkans. We have therefore supported the reconstruction of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We have also made contacts with our neighbour countries to urge them to cooperate with each other to help rehabilitate the region, develop its resources, link it to the international economy and improve the situation of its peoples.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that in order to solve the problems the world is facing it is imperative for us to work together for the benefit of mankind.

Address by The Honourable Edison James, Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, Legal Affairs, Labour and Immigration of the Commonwealth of Dominica

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, Legal Affairs, Labour and Immigration of the Commonwealth of Dominica.

The Honourable Edison James, Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, Legal Affairs, Labour and Immigration of the Commonwealth of Dominica, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, Legal Affairs, Labour and Immigration of the Commonwealth of Dominica, His Excellency The Honourable Edison James, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. James (Dominica): I recall two years ago, when, on the occasion of the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, this podium was the focus of attention. There was much enthusiasm and hope as leaders looked back on the past 50 years and looked forward to the next 50 and the coming of the new millennium. I had the honour to be among world leaders who shared the privilege of participating in that historic occasion. It was then that we as leaders made a number of pledges and committed ourselves to effecting necessary and appropriate changes to reshape and reform the United Nations. We pledged never to repeat the mistakes of the past and to work for a better world through an improved and more dynamic United Nations.

I take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the fifty-second session and to thank Ambassador Razali Ismail for his work in guiding the fifty-first session. It is with profound pleasure and a sincere sense of hope and expectation that I welcome and congratulate our new Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. I assure him that he has the full confidence and support of the Commonwealth of Dominica in his endeavours.

Notwithstanding the leadership changes, if we are to achieve our ultimate goal of a better world for all, much more must happen. The reform of the United Nations, which has been the subject of such intense debate for so long now, must become a reality. We have noted and taken seriously your commitment, Mr. President, to encourage action-oriented discussions on measures and proposals that encompass the reform of the United Nations system. It is our wish that the discussion, as vital a part of the process as it is, will be as short-lived as possible and that the implementation of reforms which we all want to see will very soon be effected.

The people of this world are demanding reform. The Organization itself needs the reform. Let us do it now. The numbers, geographic representation and decision-making process of the principal organs of the United Nations must urgently reflect the realities of the new millennium.

Membership in the United Nations is based on the sovereign equality of its Members. Whether we are small or whether we are big, we are worthy of respect. And we all have an obligation to work towards maintaining international peace and security; achieving international cooperation in solving economic, social, cultural or humanitarian problems; and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms.

We do not expect to be in an Organization where the rule is the law of the jungle; that is, the survival of the fittest. Rules and regulations of any organization which can be interpreted and implemented in a manner which threatens the survival and the very existence of its members are undesirable.

Most of us are members of the World Trade Organization (WTO), and I wish to bring it to the attention of the General Assembly and of all representatives that recent decisions taken in the WTO at the request of some Members of this very United Nations are threatening to destroy the livelihood of smaller nations. The Commonwealth of Dominica, my country, and other countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) are threatened by this action. Our main means of livelihood -- bananas — has been placed on the shakiest of grounds by this decision. Such uncertainty brings about instability and can threaten peace.

While the General Assembly has no enforcement authority, its resolutions and recommendations to Member States carry the political and moral force of

majority approval. I appeal then to Member States to use whatever is in their power to persuade the complainants against the European banana marketing regime to consider the consequences of their action and to think again.

Cliches like "desperate times call for desperate measures" and "a hungry man is an angry man" may sound banal, but they cannot be ignored. Peace in our region and peace in the world depend much on the humanitarian dispensation of justice. The action which has been taken against us in the WTO is not justice.

The *raison d'être* for the establishment of the United Nations was to maintain peace and security. You, Mr. President, in your address to this body recognized that peace and security are threatened by international terrorism. May I draw to your attention that peace and security can also be threatened by economic terrorism. Our region is now threatened by economic terrorism, and our Organization — the United Nations — has a responsibility and a duty to ensure that no form of terrorism succeeds in undermining our peace and security.

This matter is so serious that I urge the Secretary-General to pay a visit to the now tranquil and peaceful Caribbean region, starting in the Windward Islands, to get a sense of the situation for himself. For there is a flame ignited in that area which has the potential to transform itself into a conflagration of a magnitude capable of engulfing the entire hemisphere.

In May of this year in Bridgetown, Barbados, CARICOM and the United States entered into a Partnership for Prosperity and Security in the Caribbean. Our ability to meet our obligations for implementation of the Plan of Action will be seriously compromised by this decision of the WTO which seeks to deny us the opportunity to earn our living.

Our Caribbean region is often described as paradise, but sometimes there can be trouble in paradise. Our region is prone to natural disasters. Hurricanes, earthquakes and floods are not uncommon, and the world knows of the slow destruction of the island of Montserrat by the volcanic eruptions which have been going on now for over two years. Member States of CARICOM have come to the help of this small territory, however there continues to be a great need for humanitarian assistance, and we look to the Members of the United Nations for their meaningful contribution to rebuilding the Emerald Isle.

Man-made threats also plague our region, one such being the trans-shipment of hazardous waste through the Caribbean Sea. The indiscriminate pollution of the sea, the destruction of marine life by the discharge of waste into the waterway by ocean liners, and the trans-shipment of illegal drugs and arms all pose serious threats to the orderly development of the region. There is a need to establish a regime under the auspices of the United Nations to stem such practices.

We cannot help but lament that after 50 years and more our world has not yet found that peace for which this body was instituted. In the past years we have seen the struggles in the former Yugoslavia and in Central Africa. We have witnessed the scourge of ethnic cleansing and killings. And the Middle East remains unsettled. Unrest in any part of the world affects us all. It is therefore our responsibility to work towards that total peace.

We congratulate the 100 nations which have signed the Treaty banning the production and dissemination of landmines. Such weapons of destruction do not deserve to exist in a civilized world. We trust that nations which are still hesitating will soon come around and sign — and eventually ratify — the Treaty.

For there to be peace we must acknowledge the right of peoples and nations to exist, regardless of colour, class, race, creed, political belief or model of government. This decade was declared the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. We are happy to report that in the Commonwealth of Dominica the first peoples of the Caribbean, the Caribs, coexist peacefully with the rest of the population. It is our intention to work diligently with the Secretary-General so that before this decade is over there will be some tangible and positive impact on the lives of our own indigenous people which would give meaning to the noble intentions of this body in making this declaration.

The Commonwealth of Dominica as a member of CARICOM, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), is heartened by the spread of democracy throughout the hemisphere. We intend to play our part to ensure that this movement is not transient, but, rather, reflects a deep-rooted conviction of our people that this is indispensable for development and prosperity.

We respect the right of all countries to chose their own model of government, while at the same time we

urge all Members of the Organization to practice or continue to practice the democratic process and to provide for their people full opportunity to enjoy all the benefits of a democratic society.

It is against this background that the Government and people of the Commonwealth of Dominica call again on this world body not to continually close its ears to the pleas of the Republic of China for international recognition. It must be remembered that the Republic of China is a founding Member of this Organization and has been a Member for the greater part of its existence. The Republic of China on Taiwan is a politically democratic and economically dynamic society with a directly elected Government and Parliament. Dominica therefore urges Member States not to continue to ignore or block the efforts being made to admit the Republic of China to membership of this and other international bodies.

Peace in this world also requires that the hungry be fed, the homeless sheltered, the ignorant educated, all people enjoy good health, and our patrimony — the Earth — kept in a condition that we all can enjoy. We applaud and encourage the efforts of international organizations — including United Nations specialized agencies, which work to satisfy these needs and aspirations.

The effective functioning of this Organization requires proper management of its resources, both human and financial. We encourage the Secretary-General in his efforts in this regard, and we call upon all members to do their best to provide the necessary financial support to the limits of their ability. I take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Ted Turner on his generous donation to the Organization and, like him, call upon others to do likewise. I am convinced that the Secretary-General will use this gift most wisely and judiciously, knowing that proper utilization of these funds will dispose others to come forward.

Every country, even the most developed ones, has its needs. We in Dominica, a developing country, have many. Globalization and trade liberalization, combined with the impact of natural disasters, have increased the urgency for diversifying our economy. In this regard, attention is being paid to our human resource capacity, to take advantage of the revolution in technology and communication.

A major thrust in the process of diversification is tourism, but tourism with a difference: ecotourism. Earlier I mentioned the need to preserve and conserve the Earth for the enjoyment of all. My country Dominica has much to offer to visitors who want to enjoy nature, and we are working hard to make ourselves the ecotourism destination of the Caribbean. Some of those listening to me may have visited Dominica and know how difficult it is to enter there. We are taking steps to make it easier to visit my country by the construction of a 24-hour landing facility for long-range aircraft. We trust that our approach to friendly nations and institutions for assistance in this regard will receive favourable consideration.

The beginning of the new millennium is close at hand. Two years ago we all pledged to redouble our efforts to work towards fulfilling the obligations we assumed when we became Members of this great Organization. Let none of us waver in our resolve. The key to it all lies in our working together as Members of the United Nations. Let us join hands and wills to build this better world. History will judge us harshly if we do not.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, Legal Affairs, Labour and Immigration of the Commonwealth of Dominica for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Edison James, Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, Legal Affairs, Labour and Immigration of the Commonwealth of Dominica, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ivan Antonovich, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belarus.

Mr. Antonovich (Belarus): It gives me particular pleasure to congratulate you, Sir, the distinguished representative of Ukraine, on your election to the responsible post of President of the fifty-second of the General Assembly of the United Nations. I am convinced that your rich and profound experience in diplomatic relations, together with your personal qualities, will facilitate the constructive work of this General Assembly session and make it an outstanding international event. The delegation of the Republic of Belarus is ready to contribute to your endeavours in any way required. I would also like to use this opportunity to say a word of gratitude to your predecessor, Mr. Razali Ismail, for his competent and efficient presidency during the fifty-first session of the General Assembly.

Every day, international life and international relations acquire ever more multidimensional and ever deeper significance, with new meanings and trends in development that can no longer be constrained within the criteria and standards of the twentieth century. We live at a time oriented towards the future. A *fin de siècle* mentality is not just a nostalgic feeling for the century passing away, but also embraces a deep concern for the years ahead. The destiny of mankind, however contradictory and diverse, and the interests of nations and States may become more amenable to one common denominator, are increasingly concerned with the well-being of humanity, and display numerous convergent features which make it possible now to discuss the opportunity for a new international order.

Entering the twenty-first century, with its new international order, does not mean that we renounce the experience of the last 52 years in the development of the family of nations under one common programme, as set out for us by the founding fathers of the United Nations and outlined in its Charter. On the contrary, it means adjusting these lofty aims to the new realities of a multifaceted world and also making the Organization — no matter how different its separate parts are — the mainstream of human development, where the economic well-being of people brings to an end age-old ills such as starvation and epidemic diseases, as well as huge environmental threats, and which helps to achieve multilateral understanding between those participating in this development. Solving these problems is becoming the overriding ambition and the main goal and hope of the United Nations, as well as of mankind as a whole.

Right now, the United Nations has started displaying its capacity to adapt its structure and policies to the demands of the future. The orientation of the United Nations towards the future is the overriding goal that was established for it during its fiftieth anniversary celebrations. The change of leadership and the measures that are now being undertaken in this direction give sufficient grounds for optimism. We declare our support for these goals and actions. With a sense of trust and the intention to contribute, we take note of the actions of the new Secretary-General, Mr. Annan, in regard to reform within the United Nations. In this respect, I would like to quote from a letter dated 5 September 1997 sent by the President of the Republic of Belarus, Mr. Lukashenka, to the Secretary-General:

> "These reforms are a timely and meaningful response to the objectives facing the United Nations during this complex period at the turning point of the millennia, including problems which ought to be solved with the purpose of enhancing the effectiveness of the United Nations system.
>
> "The Republic of Belarus is in favour of a pragmatic, comprehensive approach to United Nations reform which would provide for the strengthening, on the basis of the opportunities available, of the United Nations potential in peacekeeping, humanitarian and informational fields."

In our opinion, these measures are very important and represent an up-to-date response to the need to settle the issues coming before the United Nations during this complex historical period as we approach the end of the millennium. These issues need to be solved in order to enhance the functional efficiency of the family of the United Nations. When we speak of reform in the United Nations, we have in mind first and foremost an effective distribution of United Nations resources, the streamlining of the Organization's administrative and organizational structures, and budgetary and structural reform of the United Nations Secretariat, as well as personnel adjustments to meet the challenges of the modern world.

When addressing United Nations reform, we place special emphasis on the reform of the Security Council, which is one of the principal United Nations bodies, responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Extremely critical in this respect is, of course, the principle of balanced representation of all regional groups of United Nations Member States on the reformed Security Council. The Republic of Belarus is convinced that allocation of one more non-permanent seat on the Security Council to the Group of Eastern European States — whose membership has more than doubled in recent years — is in full compliance with the provisions of Article 23 of the United Nations Charter, which sets forth the principle of equitable geographical distribution.

Among all the new realities that are being brought into the mosaic of international relations, efficient mechanisms for global and regional security still seem paramount. Belarus considers its national security to be inalienably connected and identified with the collective security system of the European continent. Each State has, of course, ample right independently to select the most efficient means of protecting its own national

interests, including the right to participate in regional security organizations.

For the last two years Belarus has displayed a firm stance against the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a military bloc. I hope for understanding on the part of the international community in this respect. In the event that we had on our western borders not the friendly sovereign Polish State we have now but a military organization, it would certainly push us to seriously analyse and reconsider our national security considerations.

However, recently we have noticed developments inside the NATO structure itself. We took due note of several meetings of NATO member States regarding the transformation of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council into the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, as well as the transformation of the major military aims of NATO itself.

Taking into account current realities, we would like to reiterate our position against NATO's expansion as a military organization, but also to add to it that we are in favour of its development into a universal European organization for peace and security. It is with this intention that we have entered into negotiations with NATO and presented a programme for Belarusian participation in the Partnership for Peace. We sincerely hope that by developing a more constructive approach we will reach a mutual understanding, which could be reinforced by some mutual obligations.

We would also like to state that with this evolution of NATO and a thorough analysis of existing world and regional security systems and treaties, further emphasis should be attached to well-established regional organizations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and to their closer cooperation with the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

As to the OSCE, we feel certain that it has already accumulated profound experience and skills in tackling many important security issues and is able to make a major contribution to strengthening peace and security on the continent. Therefore, the Republic of Belarus readily supports the initiatives of Russia and the Netherlands concerning a number of special events to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the First Peace Conference. Should this conference take place in 1999, it would be an important opportunity to discuss the complex problems of peaceful cooperation between Member States and to find and elaborate means to constructively handle major issues of contention and also to strengthen the legal foundations of international actions for peace.

I should like to state that the Republic of Belarus, as one of the founding Members of the United Nations, has always spoken strongly in favour of the peaceful regulation of military conflicts in different regions of the globe and of elaborating new and efficient measures to prevent the emergence of new crisis situations. That is why we share the approach of many who have spoken here, when they expressed concern about the development of the situation in the Middle East. It is our opinion that the continuation of the Arab-Israeli dialogue, which will live up to the agreements previously reached, is a must to stop terrorism in this region, to put an end to the non-stop bloodletting of innocent people and to establish a firm and lasting peace.

The same can also be said of the Balkans, which is now one of the hottest spots in the European region. We are convinced that lasting peace in the former Yugoslavia is possible only under conditions where violence is renounced and where the parties involved settle their conflicts in a peaceful manner.

The Republic of Belarus invites the General Assembly to enable the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, as a founding Member, to resume its participation in the work of the General Assembly and other bodies of the United Nations.

Unfortunately, conflicts, including military clashes, are still a reality of humanity's everyday existence. We call upon the Security Council to be more prudent in handling these conflicts, to be more diligent in seeking peaceful means to regulate them, avoiding at all costs economic destruction as well as the political and moral damage that comes with attempts to apply sanctions.

I should like to seize this opportunity to confirm the willingness of the Government of the Republic of Belarus to host the Minsk international Conference on conflict settlement in Nagorny Karabakh.

As members know, Belarus has always been among those nations which have spoken and acted strongly to make effective measures undertaken by the United Nations in the field of disarmament. I should like to remind the Assembly that Belarus was one of the first Commonwealth of Independent States countries, after the breakup of the Soviet Union, to withdraw nuclear

weapons from its territory. Belarus aims to achieve further progress in the field of disarmament, in particular by banning chemical, bacteriological and other toxic weapons, by putting an end to research into new weapons of mass destruction, and by preventing an arms race in space. Awareness of these aims means a more secure future for our children.

The Belarusian position on disarmament issues is firm and logically predictable. Apart from our refusal to station nuclear weapons on our soil, we have suggested creating a nuclear-free zone in the centre of Europe. I must admit that so far the response to this initiative has been tepid, at best. But I would also reiterate that no matter the tepid response, only the creation of regions entirely free from nuclear weapons and the nuclear threat will facilitate each important step along the road to the eventual comprehensive renouncement of nuclear weapons.

Apart from general support for the reform programmes of the United Nations, I should like to emphasize the particularly positive approach of Belarus to the idea and the philosophy of sustainable development. Pursuant to the decisions and recommendations adopted by the Rio 1992 Earth Summit, the Government of the Republic of Belarus worked out a national strategy for sustainable development, whose outline was presented to the General Assembly's special session last June.

We appreciate the great assistance rendered to us by the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, which helped us to hold our conference on sustainable development in Minsk in April 1997, which was attended by representatives of 30 countries and more than 30 international organizations. That conference was an important landmark on the path to working out an international strategy for sustainable development and outlined many of the important issues that are now faced by countries in a period of transition. I sincerely believe that the sustainable development programme launched by the United Nations will encourage the participation of other multilateral organizations in its implementation, in particular, the World Trade Organization, which could advance reforms in countries whose economies are in transition by accepting them as full members. We fervently hope that the Agenda for Development, as a long-term policy of the United Nations, will not only provide reliable mechanisms to deal with international catastrophes, such as the Chernobyl accident and others, but will also help establish a system to prevent such catastrophes and eliminate their consequences in all parts of the world.

I should like to emphasize that the Chernobyl-related activities of the United Nations as well as the international assistance in mitigating the consequences of that nuclear catastrophe are highly appreciated by the people of Belarus. Yet the assistance is needed right now — today — though we will need it in the future as well. That is a tragic reality the Republic of Belarus is living through.

As members are aware, sometimes and in some areas Belarus has been the object of criticism because of the slowness of reform and democratic transformations. Concern has been expressed regarding certain internal developments in the Republic of Belarus. While I would certainly acknowledge that some of the international community's concern has been justified, I would like very much to say that the Republic of Belarus is a sovereign State that develops its own policy with due regard for the opportunities — economic, social, moral and psychological — of its citizens, within the limits of international patterns of behaviour and with respect for human rights and personal freedoms.

It has been an uneasy path, but so far the Republic of Belarus has avoided the pitfalls in economic and political areas, and with the due assistance of the international community expects to attain certain standards compatible with the developed countries of the world. Now we are practically the only country of the Commonwealth of Independent States that had a stable economic growth of about 16 per cent during the first half of this year; we have arrested the decrease in volumes of industrial production and we are a country free from religious, ethnic or civil strife.

Of course, there are many difficulties still ahead of us. But as long as a consensus of the people is secured on major development programmes and aims, the institutes of government and democracy are stable, and international cooperation proceeds within acceptable international norms. There is hope that we shall accomplish the goals set before us.

Difficult as it might be, we have made quite a few positive steps to assure the United Nations that we are seriously focused on strengthening our participation in this international body. No matter what objective financial or other economic difficulties Belarus is experiencing, we seek to fulfil our financial obligations

before the United Nations. This year, the Government of Belarus has allotted the first instalment to gradually liquidate our arrears to the regular United Nations budget, and before the year is over we plan to contribute another $5 million. However, we hope more careful consideration can be given to reaching a fair solution in the settlement of the issue related to the payment by Belarus of its arrears in financial contributions to the United Nations regular budget and financing the United Nations peacekeeping operations.

I would take up this issue, not to emphasize the need to avoid payments, but to invite the international community to distinguish between the cases when payment is not made due to objective difficulties and when it results from the absence of will on the part of some Member States to contribute in accordance with the principle of the capacity to pay, or is an attempt to exert pressure on the United Nations and the policy it implements. There must be a common quest for special solutions to further revise the scale of assessments, to reconstruct debt in cases where economic conditions of this or that Member State do not allow for the regular payment to be made in time.

During the limited time afforded to us, it is not possible to cover the whole range of problems which confront the United Nations and which involve special actions and responsibilities of Member States. I have outlined only those which the Government of Belarus considers of the first priority to be addressed in order to secure the normal functioning of the United Nations.

I would like to close my statement on a note of cautious optimism. There are many indicators that the United Nations is advancing in the right direction, and the participation of Member States in the United Nations programmes of settling major global issues is a shade better today than it was yesterday. With all those shades blending into a positive optimistic colour, the future of humanity is more secure today than it was yesterday, and certainly a lot more secure than it was before yesterday.

The President: The next speaker is His Excellency Mr. Modibo Sidibe, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mali and for Malians Living Abroad. I give him the floor.

Mr. Sidibe (Mali) (*interpretation from French*): May I first of all congratulate you, Mr. President, most sincerely on your outstanding election to the presidency of the United Nations General Assembly at its fifty-second session. I have no doubt that thanks to your eminent qualities and your rich experience you will carry out remarkably well the mission entrusted to you. You may be assured of the complete support of the delegation of Mali.

I also want to express our appreciation and thanks to your predecessor, Ambassador Razali Ismail, for the important contribution he made to the last session as President of the General Assembly.

To the new Secretary-General of the Organization, Mr. Kofi Annan, I would like to express my fraternal and warmest congratulations. His election on 17 December 1996 was a tribute to the eminent qualities of a man who has devoted his life to the service of the United Nations. While wishing him every success in the difficult mission conferred upon him, it is my firm conviction that he will do honour to his continent, Africa, in guiding our Organization towards the next millennium.

As this fifty-second session of the General Assembly opens this year, the United Nations is at a crossroads. Two years ago in this very Hall, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, 128 Heads of State or Government forcefully reaffirmed their faith in the United Nations in its principles and its objectives. They unanimously appealed for profound reflection on the role and resources of the world Organization so that it might be given the human, material and financial capacities that are vital to its mission, and so that it might be able to enter the twenty-first century with determination and professionalism.

This appeal was not in vain. Under the dynamic leadership of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, whose courage and lucidity I wish to commend, our Organization has today embarked on an ambitious programme of reform. On 14 July last Mr. Kofi Annan, continuing the work of his predecessor, submitted to the General Assembly his report on the reform of the United Nations. Like other Member States, Mali is now considering the proposals contained in that report and will without delay submit its observations thereon. My delegation is delighted at the political will expressed by all to initiate the appropriate reforms in order to make our Organization better able to respond to the needs of our day and to the aspirations of the peoples for which it was created.

While on the topic of reform, I cannot gloss over the substantial progress made by Member States in the different working groups of the General Assembly. 1997 will mark the crowning of sustained efforts, including the fulfilment of the mandates given to the Working Groups

on, respectively, the Agenda for Development and the strengthening of the United Nations system. The unanimous adoption by the General Assembly of the documents that endorsed the often difficult and painstaking deliberations of these two Working Groups eloquently reflects our shared will to succeed, by consensus, in laying the groundwork for the restructuring and modernization of our Organization in the priority fields of development and economic cooperation.

As for the reform of the Security Council, the high-level Working Group established to study this issue has made considerable progress, although concrete measures have not been adopted on such fundamental items as the expansion and composition of the Council, and thee use of the right of veto.

However, I welcome the many constructive and often complementary proposals that have enriched the debates this year. I am convinced that by redoubling our efforts we will be able to benefit from the momentum that has been created, and that we will succeed in restructuring and modernizing the Security Council by making it more democratic and credible as well as more legitimate and transparent.

The maintenance of peace and security, we know, requires the prevention, management and settlement of crises — of which there unfortunately are still a large number, often pernicious. These crises are currently sources of grave concern to the entire international community, and particularly to Africa, where some countries continue to be afflicted by multifaceted conflicts. In this respect, it is gratifying to note that significant advances have been made here and there towards the restoration of peace and security.

My delegation is gratified at the dynamic process that led on 20 July to the holding of general, free and credible elections in Liberia, marking the end of a long and brutal civil war and the establishment in that country of democratic institutions. This victory, which is above all that of the people of Liberia themselves, must be welcomed as a successful example of the settlement of a regional conflict and should serve as a source of inspiration for the settlement of other crises.

Mali, which has played an active role in the settlement of the Liberian crisis in both the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), would like to recall here that assistance for the reconstruction of Liberia is the only means of consolidating the peace won at such cost. The results obtained by the Inter-African Mission to Monitor the Implementation of the Bangui Agreements are a good example of the virtues of direct dialogue and of international mediation.

My country welcomes the positive evolution of the crisis in the Central African Republic as a result of the commendable efforts of the International Mediation Committee established by the Nineteenth Summit Meeting of Heads of State and Government of France and Africa.

As regards Western Sahara, my delegation is pleased with the progress achieved at the end of the fourth round of private contacts on the implementation of the United Nations Settlement Plan, with a view to the organization of a referendum for self-determination.

Conversely, the existence of other centres of tension and breaches of democratic order are of grave concern. This is the case in Angola, where the delaying tactics of the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) are putting a severe strain on the peace process under way. My country supports without reservation the measures recently decided upon by the Security Council relating to this party to the conflict.

Likewise, in Sierra Leone, the situation is extremely confused because of the obstinacy of the leaders of the military *coup d'état* in holding on to power in spite of the pressure exerted by the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity and, more particularly the Economic Community of West African States whose select ministerial committee has courageously and selflessly undertaken difficult negotiations in order to achieve the re-establishment of constitutional order with the return of the democratically elected president.

My country, which is a member of the International Mediation Committee in the Republic of the Congo, is gravely concerned by the situation of widespread civil war prevailing in that country. Once again, we appeal to the sense of responsibility of the parties and ask them to engage resolutely and very quickly in a political settlement of the crisis so that the mediation process can be brought to a successful conclusion.

This crucial moment for Africa is equally crucial for the Middle East, where the dynamic of peace that began with the Madrid Conference is increasingly being called into question by the recent serious events. This is the time and place to call urgently on the co-sponsors of the

peace process and the international community as a whole to take further initiatives to safeguard the peace process, *inter alia* by persuading the parties to resume the negotiations as a matter of urgency with a view to the application of the agreements that have been concluded.

My country, Mali, also remains concerned by the persistence of the sanctions against Member States of our Organization, in particular the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, and by the suffering the sanctions cause for the peoples of these countries.

For more than 50 years, the realization of the ideal of disarmament has been at the centre of our constant concern to build a system of collective security, free of weapons of mass destruction. From this viewpoint significant progress has been made towards, in particular, the reduction and ultimate elimination of nuclear arsenals. In this respect, Mali welcomes the entry into force on 29 April 1997 of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction.

Nevertheless, the objective of general and complete disarmament has still to be achieved. On the basis of this conviction, Mali has demonstrated its commitment to this goal by taking concrete initiatives at the international, regional and national levels. Evidence of this is the resolution initiated by my country in 1994 and co-sponsored by about 20 Member States, regarding "Assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and collecting them". This initiative by Mali, which contributed to initiating the now well-known concept of "microdisarmament" within our Organization, is aimed at drawing the attention of the international community to the disastrous consequences of small arms, particularly in the developing countries where, as we know, they play a large part in fuelling conflicts.

All this emphasizes how important it is urgently to support the efforts of the countries of the Saharo-Sahelian subregion in order to stem the phenomenon of the proliferation of small arms, especially through effective control of borders and the review of legal instruments regarding the bearing of arms.

Along the same lines, from 24 to 28 March 1997, the Government of Mali organized, together with the United Nations Department of Political Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), a "Week of Peace" to commemorate the first anniversary of the "Flame of Peace". The international forum, held on that occasion, which brought together the representatives of the countries of the subregion and of the institutions and bodies to which I have just referred, gave an opportunity to analyse the factors that led to the restoration of peace in the northern regions of Mali and to identify ways and means of ensuring lasting peace and of promoting a real culture of peace.

I would like here to echo the fervent appeal made at that forum for good governance, which favours participation over exclusion and dialogue over confrontation, and which assures respect for democratic principles and human rights. I also wish, from this rostrum, to make an appeal to the international community to give its full support to the proposal for a moratorium on the import, export and production of light weapons that was formulated during the consultations held at the same time as the "Week of Peace". In addition to the countries of the West African subregion, these consultations brought together representatives of the United Nations, OAU, the ECOWAS/Togo agreement on non-aggression and defence assistance (ANAD), and our development partners.

Furthermore, the conflicts in recent years have shown that conventional weapons can also cause mass destruction. For that reason my country welcomed the adoption on 18 September 1997 of the Convention on the total ban of anti-personnel mines, and supports the international efforts, including the Ottawa process, to achieve the total elimination of anti-personnel mines at the global level.

The values of peace, freedom and economic and social justice which inspired the founding fathers of the United Nations must remain today, more than ever, the foundations of the joint action incumbent on us in the quest for a decent life for everyone. In this respect, we must, together and in a united way, seek concerted solutions to the persistent problems of underdevelopment.

Thus, from New York in 1990, with the World Summit for Children, to Rome in 1996 with the World Food Summit, the great international conferences of the decade have contributed remarkably to the preparation of a new design for human society at the dawning of the third millennium. The paradigm of sustainable development, based on economic growth that is sustained, socially equitable and ecologically viable, constitutes the common denominator on which the international community now agrees in order to give new

direction to the collective search for the economic and social well-being of our peoples. The mixed results of last June's special session of the General Assembly devoted to an overall evaluation of the implementation of Agenda 21 are a sharp reminder of the vital need to think for our world globally and act collectively to meet the challenges confronting our planet.

Regardless of the angle from which we approach them, the problems at the end of this century cannot be resolved except through concerted and integrated action — action capable of managing harmoniously the upheavals accompanying this changing period of history. The consensus achieved in the Agenda for Development shows our shared faith in the virtues of a new global partnership for development, based on the imperative of interdependence and on mutually beneficial action.

Since the conceptual framework has been defined and accepted by all, it is now time — and high time — to move to action through a rational mobilization of resources in keeping with the generous goals formulated in the Agenda for Development.

The settlement of the debt crisis, just remuneration for commodities, the renunciation of trade barriers and an increase in official development assistance — this is essentially the direction that needs to be taken in order to build a world that is more accommodating to all, so true is it that our global village cannot be built in a lasting way if the majority of its members are excluded. The fight against poverty in this context has absolute priority, because it is simply unacceptable at the dawning of the third millennium that millions of men and women throughout the world should continue to lack the minimal conditions for a decent life. The aspiration of peoples for a better life is a legitimate quest which cannot be ignored.

As Mali sees it, any work towards sustainable development is above all a national responsibility, through the effective definition and application of sound macroeconomic policies, based on transparency, the pre-eminent rule of law, the practice of democracy, respect for human rights, social justice, and the participation of all in the effort of national development. For my country, this is the surest path to follow in our quest for the shared ideal assigned to us by the United Nations Charter:

> "to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom".

We are on the eve of a new millennium, which will see the emergence of new challenges and new threats, but also of great dreams and hopes for humankind.

As responsible leaders of our States, we have an obligation to seek ways and means to meet these challenges. But we also need to guide in the right direction the aspirations of our peoples to live in peace, liberty, progress and active solidarity.

Fifty-two years ago the founding fathers of our Organization cleared the way for us to attain these noble objectives, which are still relevant. If we apply the terms of the Charter, we will be able to respond to particular uncertainties and put an end to the climate of doubt, fear and suspicion that characterizes present day international relations.

We must also agree to do more and to do better in our quest for a better future for the human race. We believe in the United Nations as the institution to help us achieve this.

The President of the Republic of Mali, His Excellency Mr. Alpha Oumar Konaré, is convinced that a restructured, modernized United Nations, endowed with the essential capacity to act, can help to resolve our disputes, ensure more orderly management of world affairs and eliminate the injustice, disparity and egoism that threaten humankind.

That is why my country, Mali, will continue to work with enthusiasm and determination to ensure the emergence of a United Nations that is truly united in its diversity, at peace with itself and resolutely committed to the service of all peoples.

The President: I now call on the Minister of State and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Gabon, His Excellency Mr. Casimir Oye Mba.

Mr. Oye Mba (Gabon) (*interpretation from French*): At the outset I should like to convey to you, Sir, the warm congratulations of the Government of Gabon and of my delegation on your outstanding election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session. I should also like to congratulate the other members of the Bureau.

In selecting you, Mr. President, our Assembly acknowledged your country's role in world politics and, above all, your personal qualities, which augur well for

the success of this session. I am indeed convinced that under your guidance our work will be directed towards continuing our discussions in greater depth, taking common positions on important issues and adopting resolutions with the broadest possible consensus.

I should like to express our appreciation to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Razali, for the excellent work he did during his presidency.

This is also the first opportunity I have had to express my heartfelt congratulations to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, on his election as head of our Organization. I assure him of Gabon's full support for all the efforts he will need to make to ensure the success of the action he takes in the service of the United Nations.

Mr. Mohammed (Ethiopia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

It is often said that the international context has changed, that the fields of activity of the States that we represent are being subjected to attacks on all sides as science and technology progress. The globalization of our economies, based on the proclaimed virtues of liberalism, has not yet yielded all that it could.

The new world order that we have so long hoped for has not yet arrived, because so many contradictions are woven into the fabric of international relations. Yet no one can fail to see that it represents both the matrix and the support essential to carrying out the reform of the United Nations so that it can better serve peace among nations and the development of their peoples.

I should like first to speak about peace, the chief wealth of nations, and I shall do so, of course, in the light of our own experience.

In Gabon our understanding of peace underlies all the political developments we have experienced and are still experiencing today. The organization of successive local, legislative and senatorial elections in a calm political and social context at the end of 1996 and early this year provided proof of the fundamental role of the democratic legitimacy sorely needed today for the exercise of political power.

This same perception underlies all the activities of which we are the beneficiaries and which have made Gabon, through the personal presence of its President, Omar Bongo, a country that enjoys the great friendship and trust of other members of the international community, especially its neighbours.

In fact, Gabon has contributed in a substantial and significant manner to easing the tension in many parts of Africa.

Gabon, together with Chad, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Mali, sent almost 300 soldiers as part of an African peacekeeping force to restore institutional stability in the Central African Republic.

On behalf of my country I should like to pay tribute to the Inter-African Mission to Monitor the Implementation of the Bangui Agreements, established by the Security Council.

Given the very disturbing situation in Congo (Brazzavile), and at the request of the Congolese parties, Gabon agreed to take charge of the international mediation committee, under the leadership of His Excellency El Hadj Omar Bongo, assisted by the joint United Nations/Organization of African Unity Special Representative, Ambassador Mohamed Sahnoun. A similar request had already been made to President Bongo by our Congolese brothers during earlier crises, in 1992 and 1993. The current crisis, which erupted in early July 1997, is the longest and the most bloody — the official death toll is 4,000 to 5,000 — and the most complex.

Despite the many obstacles that this mediation effort is encountering, Gabon is doing its utmost to find a positive solution to this conflict. It is essentially a political and internal conflict, but it must be clear to everyone that the situation could drift out of control, with repercussions at the subregional and international levels. Even so, as the French writer Beaumarchais said,

> "As success becomes more difficult to achieve, the need for action becomes more pressing."

In this connection, I am pleased to note the encouraging reaction of the international community in general, and more specifically, of the European Union and France, which have voiced their support and renewed their expression of trust in international mediation and in the Head of State of Gabon, and have urged him to continue his efforts.

To give the Assembly an idea of what has been done, I would just like briefly to mention that President Bongo has proposed, on the one hand, a ceasefire

agreement and, on the other, a political agreement to cover the transitional period from now until the presidential elections.

The draft political agreement is the fifth one proposed since the negotiations began. It is based on the idea of power-sharing and the balanced participation of all political forces in terms of holding power during the transitional period. The breakdown is as follows. Mr. Lissouba will remain as President of the Republic and Head of State. To counterbalance this, as it were, a Prime Minister, the Head of Government, will be appointed by the President from among the members of the Opposition. In addition, three Vice-Presidents of the Republic are to be appointed by the Head of State.

We were unable to finalize this draft agreement during the discussions. Things started to happen quickly in Brazzaville: fighting continued; Mr. Kolelas, the Mayor of Brazzaville, who had been heading the national mediation efforts, was appointed Prime Minister; and a Government was set up. Of course, all this has meant that negotiations are on hold.

Against this background of uncertainty, President Bongo invited nine Heads of State of Central and Western Africa to a special meeting on the Congo which was held in Libreville on 14 and 15 September 1997. President Lissouba was unable to join his colleagues but he sent his Prime Minister, Mr. Kolelas.

The Libreville summit reaffirmed support for international mediation efforts led by President Bongo. It also made an urgent appeal to the warring factions to stop fighting and resolutely to continue with negotiations to try and find a political settlement to the crisis. So far, I have to say, the appeal has not met with the reaction on the ground we had hoped for. But we are still hopeful that discussions will soon be resumed, for this is the only way we are going to find a lasting and constructive settlement.

Faced with this situation, what have we done here in the United Nations? I should remind the Assembly that very soon after international mediation began, the President of the Republic of Gabon called for a commitment from the international community in terms of deploying an international force to separate the warring factions in Congo (Brazzaville).

Several African countries in a commendable upsurge of solidarity, responded favourably, expressing their willingness to provide troops for the international force. President Bongo brought the matter before the Security Council, which said it accepted the principle, but which imposed various conditions that, when analysed, leave one with the impression that if they were met there would be practically no point in sending the force.

Time is passing. Time is of the essence. Congolese people are still dying; others are fleeing their country; and thousands more are still wandering, distraught and desperate, in the forests of the Congo, seeking makeshift shelter.

Can we really continue calmly to sit in Manhattan or in the offices of our capitals and discuss what is going on? We know that in the recent past in other parts of the world the same cunning preventive measures — I was going to say the same procrastination — did not prevail. No, we must do something for the Congolese people. They are citizens of the world, our world, as well.

I must emphasize this: the impact of armed conflicts is so great that it is more necessary than ever to stress specific measures to prevent them. For developing countries, like mine, that cannot and must not afford the luxury of high military expenditure, the maintenance of international peace and security must be provided for "upstream" on the basis of preventive measures. It is because we believe deeply in this principle that the States in our subregion, Members of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa have been cooperating and taking action since 1992 to strengthen mutual trust and security at the subregional level.

These contacts have led, *inter alia*, to the signing in Yaoundé in July 1996, by virtually all the members of this Committee — except one — of a non-aggression pact, which is an important measure to strengthen peace.

More recently, at its ninth Ministerial Meeting, last July in Libreville, attended by four out of five representatives of the permanent members of the Security Council, we adopted a major plan of action whose main thrust is: the establishment of an early-warning mechanism as a way of preventing conflict in Central Africa; the organization in the medium term of a regional conference on democratic institutions and peace in Central Africa; and training seminars for law enforcement personnel on peacekeeping operations, with the goal of preparing countries of the subregion to participate, with United Nations assistance, in possible future peacekeeping operations.

In my capacity as Chairman of the Bureau of that Committee, I should like to draw the keen attention of all executive bodies operating under the aegis of the United Nations and the European Union, and our partners in the subregion, to the benefits of effectively establishing this early-warning mechanism before the end of 1997.

Still in that capacity, I wish to appeal to all Member States and to the international community as a whole to contribute to the Trust Fund set up by the Secretary-General to finance the work of the Committee.

Looking at the crises that have erupted recently in Central Africa, I have to say that today the subregion is facing the possibility of many conflicts flaring up, involving populations beyond our national boundaries, threatening the stability of our States and even calling into question the principle of the inviolability of borders — a principle that the Organization of African Unity has held dear since its inception. The danger is real. We must ward it off.

Through me, Gabon welcomes the United States initiative to convene a special meeting of the Security Council on the situation in Africa, the first of its kind. We are grateful for the fact that on that solemn occasion, on 25 September 1997, the Security Council reaffirmed its principal responsibility for the preservation of peace on our continent.

But how can we forget that United Nations files are bursting with piles of reports, declarations and resolutions on Africa, all of them equally relevant?

Everyone here will recall that some 10 years ago the General Assembly held a special session on Africa. Yes, I know — they say that now that the cold war has ended Africa is no longer of prime strategic importance. Too bad for us! For my part, I would say "So much the better for us", because we Africans have no reason to cry over the fall of the Berlin Wall. That was a tremendously important event for us too; it opened up new prospects. Today, however, the African peoples, just like others, are no longer willing to be paid in words and slogans. They thus expect concrete measures to emerge from the special meeting that was held by the Security Council last week.

Although Africa is no longer of prime strategic importance, is Africa not today, where the United Nations is concerned, its real challenge, I might even say its guilty conscience — because of the Organization's underlying philosophy and vocation?

Looking beyond Africa, Gabon is also greatly concerned over the blockage in the Middle East process, and we invite all the parties there to resume the dialogue, with the support of the whole of the international community, for there, as elsewhere, no lasting solution can be achieved through force.

The wars and conflicts we all deplore are made possible by the devastating force of weapons. We must therefore patiently and resolutely succeed in disarming the nations of the world.

Thus, we welcome the progress made in this area by the entry into force of the Convention on the prohibition of chemical weapons, which demonstrates the will of the international community to eliminate that category of weapons of mass destruction.

In the same connection, my country supports the Ottawa process aimed at a complete ban on anti-personnel landmines. The recent Oslo Diplomatic Conference on that subject worked along the lines we had hoped it would. We regret, however, that some countries were unable to join in the powerful and promising consensus that emerged there. We trust that in the near future they will be able to do so. The representative I sent to Oslo told me that some of those present had tried to establish for those weapons a special category that they would be able to retain, a category of what they called "intelligent" anti-personnel mines. I do not know what that means. Intelligent or stupid, anti-personnel mines kill, and they often kill the innocent. They must therefore be banned. If while playing in a field your child's leg is torn off by a so-called intelligent mine, you would find no consolation in the thought that the mine was an intelligent one.

In any event, Gabon urges all United Nations Member States to bend all their efforts towards adopting a plan of action for general and complete disarmament. Humanity will be the better for it.

We are not sufficiently aware of the human suffering that underlies armed conflicts, particularly the suffering of the victims, and especially of women, the elderly and children, for killing them means killing the life, the past and the future of the human race. In that connection, one can only employ the word "abominable" in describing the growing use of children in conflicts.

Over the past decade a million children have been killed, 6 million have been seriously wounded or

handicapped for life, more than a million have been orphaned or separated from their families, and millions of others are suffering serious psychological damage. This dark picture is even darker in Africa than in other continents. That is why Gabon, a party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and a signatory of the Charter of the Rights and Welfare of the African Child, joins the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in condemning the use of children as soldiers and urges Governments and all combatants on the battlefield to halt a number of particularly shameful practices, namely, the recruitment of children into the armed forces, the participation of children in combat, and violations and abuses to which they are often subjected.

In another area, the Gabonese authorities are deeply concerned by the struggle against the scourges of crime and drug proliferation, which are other sources of human suffering. We have taken a number of initiatives to combat them, including the reorganization of our security services and the creation of an interministerial commission to combat drug addiction. However, combating those phenomena clearly calls for resolution and determined acts of solidarity and cooperation at the international level.

Turning now to the question of development, I should like to recall that the final goal of government is the well-being of peoples.

Against that background, the international community has evidenced its will to improve the human condition by organizing various workshops, seminars and conferences. I would just mention the Rio Conference on the environment, the Vienna Conference on human rights, the Beijing Conference on women, the Cairo Conference on population, the Copenhagen Conference on social development and the Stockholm Conference on the sexual exploitation of children, as well as the very latest special session of the General Assembly devoted to the mid-term review of Agenda 21.

However, even after all those meetings that aroused such hopes, it looks as though our community is not truly determined to fulfil the obligations it has freely entered into. It seems to be difficult to translate proclaimed intentions into action.

Gabon therefore hopes that there will be greater movement towards action at the forthcoming Kyoto Conference on climate change, which will be a test of the industrialized countries' commitments to sustainable development.

Similarly, we would encourage the International Seabed Authority to continue its work, particularly on the elaboration of a balanced mining code that takes into account the interests of all States as well as environmental questions.

The importance of the eight most developed countries and their real ability to have an impact on the international economy give us ground to hope that the commitments entered into at the recent Denver summit will enable us to work towards strengthening an international economy at the service of humanity.

This may sound like a litany of ills, but until the situation improves we must continue to repeat that Africa is suffering from very serious structural problems. These consist, *inter alia*, of economies, often based on a single crop, that are dependent on the outside world; deterioration in the terms of trade; reverse finance flow; the lowest level of development; the largest number of least developed countries and of displaced persons and refugees.

However, I think it is important to highlight the fact that in addition to its potential, which it owes to raw materials, Africa also represents an effective market of more than 700 million inhabitants.

We know that if it is to develop, our continent must first and foremost rely on itself. Yet there is so much to be done. We are familiar with the slogan, "Trade, not aid". It is not entirely untrue. But would it be outrageous to say that it is not completely true either, because it is obvious that in Africa there exist countries whose development level is already allowing them to cherish some legitimate commercial and trade ambitions on the international market as well as countries that still require assistance, at least in certain areas, and particularly in the social area. To the latter countries, it would be better to say: "Trade *and* aid".

It is in that spirit that Gabon will attend the ninth summit of the African, Caribbean and Pacific States (ACP) associated with the European Union in the context of the Lomé Convention. My country will have the honour of hosting this summit in its capital on 6 and 7 November 1997. I take this opportunity to say to the ACP countries — and all of them are here at the General Assembly — that we are ready to welcome them next month and that we await them all.

Gabon is a beneficiary of the international economic environment, and I would therefore like to share with the Assembly our experience in this area.

Since mid-1995, Gabon's economic performance has improved considerably. The rate of growth has increased significantly; inflation has been reduced to a very low level; and our situation outside the country has been strengthened. Structural measures and administrative reform are accelerating. The Government is stepping up the liberalization of the economy and the cleaning up of the business environment. A vast programme of privatizing public enterprises has already been put into effect. It began with the Gabon Water and Energy Company. The privatization was carried out in very orderly and transparent conditions — to the surprise of not a few — and the programme will be continued in other spheres.

Aware of the decisive role the private sector has to play in Gabon's prosperity and in increasing the standard of living of its people, our Government is trying to establish a legal and regulatory environment which will facilitate private investment and open up various sectors of the economy to competition. We sincerely state that Gabon is open to all private investment. As President Bongo likes to say, "Gabon is not the private reserve of anybody".

The Gabonese authorities are making sure that our commitments in the area of loans and repayments are realistic and viable. They call for appropriate treatment in respect of our foreign public debt, because the strict deadlines for repayment often hamper our efforts to revitalize our economy.

Finally, partnership in all areas must be strengthened and the transfer of technologies encouraged, so that the national capacities of our countries can be revitalized.

In his speech to the General Assembly, the Secretary-General expressed the hope that this session will be known as the Reform Assembly. Indeed, the world today is not what it was in 1945. Our Organization must adapt to the new realities. Gabon therefore welcomes the recommendations of the Secretary-General for the reform of the Organization.

The current discussions must result in consensus machinery that will safeguard the various interests of the Member States. But it remains true that no reform plan can be successful until the financial situation of the United Nations is cured.

My country recalls that we attach great priority to the recommendations formulated by the Organization of African Unity at its last summit, in Harare, and to the proposals made by the Non-Aligned Movement at its Ministerial Conference in New Delhi in April 1997.

President Bongo spoke as long ago as 1977 on the question of an increase in the membership of the Security Council, and I had the occasion to repeat his position before the General Assembly in 1995 and 1996. Let me repeat it one more time. Gabon suggests that we can reconcile the seemingly contradictory requirements in this way: by eliminating the geographical imbalance in the Security Council so as to consolidate its legitimacy and effectiveness; by making the decision-making process in the Council more democratic; and by allowing for a fairer representation of Africa. Africa calls for two permanent seats, with the same rights the other permanent members have; the seats would be rotated in accordance with principles that the African Group will submit in due time to the General Assembly.

Gabon reaffirms here its commitment to the principles of universality and the sovereign equality of States. These should underlie all the thinking in regard to reform.

It is my hope that this session of the General Assembly will enable us to take another step towards strengthening the ideals we all share.

This transition towards a more humane world will not be without perils. We will have to combat simultaneously the upsurge of selfishness and the development of false solidarity, which can lead our peoples to fratricidal struggle.

I am convinced that, united, we will take up the challenge to build a better world.

The Acting President: The next speaker is the Minister for Tourism and Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Zambia, His Excellency The Honourable Amusaa K. Mwanamwambwa. I now call on him.

Mr. Mwanamwambwa (Zambia): I am pleased to convey the congratulations of the Zambian delegation to His Excellency Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko on his election as President of the fifty-second session of the United Nations General Assembly. This session is especially important in that it is meant to give impetus to the

ongoing negotiations on the future structure of the United Nations through the reform process. We are confident that with his proven diplomatic skills he will steer the deliberations of this session to a successful conclusion.

For his predecessor, Ambassador Razali Ismail of Malaysia, my delegation has only words of admiration and gratitude for the exemplary work he did during the past session of the General Assembly.

I wish to express my delegation's satisfaction with the skilful manner in which the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, has managed the affairs of the Organization since his election last year. Zambia is confident that, given his tested managerial and diplomatic skills, he will effectively manage this Organization as it deals with critical issues confronting the international community today.

At the fiftieth session, world leaders gathered here to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. In celebrating the occasion, we took time to assess the contribution of the United Nations to world peace, economic and social development, and the observance of fundamental human rights, and we reaffirmed our faith in the Organization and agreed to vigorously live up to the objectives of the Charter by strengthening and revitalizing the United Nations system.

It is against this background that my delegation believes that the current session of the General Assembly should seize the opportunity to advance the reform process further. In this regard, it is Zambia's conviction that a comprehensive approach to United Nations reform would, apart from improving efficiency and effectiveness, ensure the implementation of the programmes of action of the global conferences of the 1990s — from Rio to Cairo; Copenhagen to Beijing and Istanbul — which underscored the importance of sustainable development and made it a central theme and a priority. These conferences provided a starting point for a global effort in advancing sustainable development, set goals and defined broad plans of action that provided the basis on which national and international actions could proceed.

While we have agreed on the necessity of reforming our Organization, it is important to ask ourselves what we want to achieve through these reforms. In principle, Zambia welcomes and has carefully studied the Secretary-General's proposals and measures on the negotiations for reform of the United Nations. My delegation expects that the reform process would not only result in a more democratic, efficient, effective and financially stable United Nations, but also have a significant impact on economic and social development. Zambia would like to see the development mandate of the United Nations given priority and prominence in these reforms.

Related to this reform process is the pressing issue of the critical financial situation of the United Nations. It is our view that this state of affairs is the major limiting factor undermining the ability of the United Nations to deal adequately with its mandates in many areas. We would therefore like to see arrears owed to the Organization paid in full, on time and without preconditions.

One of the key components of the reforms of the United Nations is the reform of the Security Council. We demand that the expansion of the Security Council make it more representative and more democratic. This expansion should be at both permanent and non-permanent levels of membership. In this regard, my delegation wishes to state categorically its support for the position adopted by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Non-Aligned Movement that the expanded Security Council should have 26 members.

Zambia further supports the demand that the regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean now deserve seats as permanent members on an expanded Security Council. Africa, commanding nearly 30 per cent of the membership of the United Nations, certainly deserves to have two permanent and three non-permanent seats on the Security Council.

My delegation reaffirms its commitment to general and complete disarmament. In this spirit, we would also like to welcome the recent agreement reached in Oslo, Norway, to ban anti-personnel landmines. We hope that all countries of the world will be able to sign the agreement in December this year in Ottawa.

International peace and security also continues to be threatened by conflicts around the globe. Africa, in particular, has witnessed many civil wars whose consequences have been devastating.

Zambia continues to be concerned about the conflicts in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa, the Republic of Congo, Sudan and elsewhere on the continent. We would like to appeal to the parties to these conflicts to commit themselves to the principle of negotiated and peaceful settlement of disputes. We call

upon the international community to provide all necessary assistance for resolving these conflicts at an early stage.

In Angola, the civil war has caused some of the worst human suffering. As host to the talks that led to the signing of the Lusaka Protocol, Zambia has a firm desire to ensure that there is lasting peace and security in Angola. However, Zambia is disappointed at the failure of the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) to comply with its obligations under the Lusaka Protocol and the provisions of relevant Security Council resolutions. Zambia would like to record its displeasure at UNITA's intransigence.

Zambia, together with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and other countries, will continue its efforts to promote conditions leading to the establishment of lasting peace and security in Angola. We believe that peace in Angola will enlarge the parameters of peace in southern Africa, which will enable the countries of the region to concentrate their efforts on social and economic development in an environment of democracy.

Zambia reaffirms the position of the OAU with regard to the situation in Sierra Leone. In this regard, we appeal to the international community to continue to deny recognition to the military junta in Sierra Leone. We demand that the junta hand power back to the democratically elected Government of Sierra Leone.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has just emerged from a seven-month civil war. We are delighted that the country has now begun to turn its attention to the challenges of reconstruction and development. We thus appeal to the international community to unconditionally assist the new administration in that country in facilitating rehabilitation of infrastructure and capacity-building to consolidate the political and economic stability of the country.

We congratulate the people of Liberia on finding peace through the democratic process and also take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) for the commendable role it has played in resolving the Liberian conflict.

Regarding peacekeeping in Africa, we believe that Africa has the primary responsibility for resolving the conflicts on our continent. It is precisely for this reason that the Organization of African Unity established the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, which we hope the international community will fully support.

On the economic front, Zambia is gratified to note that sub-Saharan Africa has begun to record positive growth rates, which averaged 5 per cent in 1996, the highest level in 20 years. Much of this success is attributable to the social and economic reforms undertaken by many African countries. However, this positive achievement can be sustained only if poverty, deprivation and marginalization are effectively addressed.

Another factor that continues to constrain efforts for sustainable development in many African countries, including my own, is the heavy external debt burden. Zambia welcomes the steps taken by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to implement the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative. We are, however, gravely concerned about the uncertainties surrounding the funding for the Initiative. We also remain concerned about the proliferation of conditions, in particular the use of non-economic factors in determining access to the Initiative.

Zambia believes that the United Nations has a duty to provide leadership in forging international consensus on the crippling external debt problem of developing countries and assisting in the mobilization of new resources for development financing. It is also our expectation that the United Nations will provide leadership in redressing the widening development disparities existing among nations, and addressing the increasing trends towards unfair trading practices and protectionism in international trade, which have had the effect of marginalizing some regions, notably Africa.

Zambia is very concerned about the continued decline in official development assistance at a time when the United Nations is dealing with follow-up to recent international conferences on development. There is also increasing evidence of lack of enthusiasm for honouring agreements freely entered into at international conferences. A case in point is the failure by Governments to implement the agreements, commitments and recommendations made at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

The special session of the General Assembly held this past June to review progress in implementation of the Rio agreements found that the rate of implementation of the programme of action has been extremely slow, mainly due to lack of resources. It was also evident that

there was a marked lack of political will to ensure the fulfilment of the agreements of the Rio consensus on environment and development. Zambia would therefore like to see, during this session of the General Assembly, progress on the proposal to convene an international conference on the financing of development. As we all are aware, there has been little progress on this proposal since the forty-sixth session of the General Assembly, when it emerged.

On the domestic front, we in Zambia have adopted national programmes of action in pursuit of the goals and objectives of the Copenhagen World Summit on Social Development, the Cairo Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Declaration. In implementing these programmes of action, my Government has targeted the most vulnerable members of our society to enhance the capacity of their involvement in the country's economic and social life, with a view to raising their standards of living. In this regard, the Government has taken steps to ensure that there is equitable access to quality education by all Zambians by providing universal basic education within the shortest realistic time-frame. A comprehensive programme of health reforms is also under way, and this should also result in the improvement of the health status of our people. The measures and programmes that the Government has undertaken are not, however, sufficient to fully attain the objectives of these programmes of action, mainly due to limited financial resources.

We wish to conclude by underscoring the continuing relevance of the United Nations. The case for reform has been made. We owe it to ourselves and to future generations to ensure that we apply ourselves to the task of reform, knowing well that the world needs a United Nations that can be relied upon to act effectively in ensuring peace and security, and in achieving international cooperation in the economic, social, cultural and humanitarian fields, as envisaged in the Charter of the United Nations.

The Acting President: I call on the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, His Excellency The Honourable Phillip Muller.

Mr. Muller (Marshall Islands): I wish to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, to congratulate Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko on his election and to commend the President of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly for a job well done.

My delegation has stressed the importance of sustainable development ever since we first became a Member of the United Nations. Our convictions and our support were most recently reiterated by His Excellency The Honourable Imata Kabua, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, at the special session of the General Assembly to review Agenda 21. It is, and will remain, the cornerstone of the Government's policy, but I must recall the sentiments that we have often voiced: sustainable development is not the easiest path to travel for a small country like the Marshall Islands. There are numerous obstacles which we must face and which are impeding our progress. Please let me try to put this into better perspective.

Population growth in the Marshall Islands and in many parts of the Pacific is of great concern to our Governments. It has been as high as 4.2 per cent but now appears to be slowing down to 3.5 per cent. This is nevertheless far too high a figure for our small country to sustain. With rather limited resource bases to begin with, it is difficult to imagine what job opportunities will have to be created for new generations. We are already facing problems with layoffs in the public sector. Granted, it was much too large. It was at one point almost 60 per cent of the work force but is now down to 43 per cent. This is still a very high number, and we are looking into all sorts of methods of increasing private sector investment to increase private sector employment.

But population growth also has a negative impact on our local environment. There is a growing trend of migration to the two main urban centres of the Marshall Islands — Majuro, the capital, and Ebeye, close to the United States base at Kwajalein. These areas are becoming increasingly crowded, and there is an urgent need to find local solutions. There is a great need to improve urban conditions, but at the same time we also wish to reduce the rate at which the urban centre population grows.

In a democracy like ours, it is difficult to try to impose any restrictions; instead, we have tried to look into incentives. One idea that has been tried is job creation in the outer islands. We have long been aware of the potential that the outer islands could have if there were only more investment in sustainable development projects.

Population growth is causing difficulties for the country in many diverse fields, but Government and local authority action is making some progress. Our youth and

church groups in particular are taking up this issue as a main concern for the future. But this is only one of many problem which we have to face.

We have by no means given up on the struggle to achieve sustainable development and the improvement of living standards in the Marshall Islands. On the Government side we are first of all looking at how existing structures can be reformed and how better to utilize our resources. We are interested in any innovations that could help us. But it is increasingly clear that if we are to break out of destructive cycles and move away from unsustainable patterns, then we must all work together. There will continue to be a need for external assistance to the Republic of the Marshall Islands, but this can and must be channelled in a more appropriate manner.

Last year we reported that the damage caused by nuclear-weapons testing in the Marshall Islands was far more extensive and devastating than previously understood. We now know that many more islands and groups of people were affected. The testing programme in the Marshall Islands helped the international community understand the effects of nuclear weapons on people and the environment. This knowledge was a contributing factor to the prevention of nuclear war during the cold-war era. In the Marshall Islands, we believe that we played a significant role in bringing about the end of the cold war. We share the commitment of the United Nations to world peace, security and disarmament.

There is little question that the nuclear-testing programme in the Marshall Islands was the defining experience of the Marshallese people in this century. The 67 nuclear-weapon tests conducted in our country and the tests conducted on our neighbouring Pacific islands contaminated every inch of our environment and exposed each one of our citizens to radiation. As a result, my Government is desperately seeking resources to address the direct medical and environmental consequences of radiation exposure, since we do not have sufficient funds. We are also struggling to deal with the indirect problems of the displacement of, and the lack of adequate medical care for, the affected population. It places an additional burden on our already constrained medical care resources.

We cannot solve these problems on our own, and we feel obliged to appeal to the international community. We certainly appreciate all efforts to address our problems made by our former administering authority, and we are encouraged by recent indications that the United States is willing to address outstanding concerns. Yet present efforts to address lingering consequences are inadequate. Marshallese people have the basic human right, like all people throughout the world, to a healthy and clean environment. We are justified, therefore, in asking assistance in restoring our lands and returning our displaced populations to a safe environment.

In this regard the United Nations has an important role to play. We are encouraged that the International Atomic Energy Agency is in the process of conducting a survey in the northern areas of the Marshall Islands. But another body, the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, could in our view have a much greater role. We have noted the terms of reference of that Scientific Committee, and we see no reason why it cannot undertake studies that could in the future assist those populations that are suffering from the effects of atomic radiation. In our view it must go beyond a simple academic understanding and have a role that would allow more interaction with affected countries. I was also a little puzzled by the brevity of the Scientific Committee's last report — only one page. We would like to request that the Committee expand its scope of work, to see how it could look into areas, like the Marshall Islands, affected by nuclear tests. We would be willing to assist the Scientific Committee in obtaining, for its consideration, documents and declassified information pertaining to nuclear testing and its effects on people. My delegation intends to review this issue in the Fourth Committee.

My country, all low-lying atolls, with no mountains, is also facing a most serious threat of sea level rise. While we are here discussing this issue, the effects of erosion, storms and tide surges are already being felt in the Marshall Islands. We are of the firm opinion that the scientists working with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have by now made such a convincing argument about this troubling issue. This consensus has been reflected in the acceptance by all Governments concerned of the Second Assessment Report of the IPCC. As a result of this acceptance of the scientific proof, we would have expected, at the very least, that the developed countries would agree to undertake so-called no-regrets measures. Such measures seek to improve efficiency and reduce waste, and to develop alternative sources of energy. My Government fully supports such initiatives, as they seem to us to be a perfectly sensible way to begin addressing climate change. But we are finding that there is resistance even to such a modest idea aimed at trying to halt this irresponsible waste of natural resources and fossil fuels.

I have been hearing reports that in the negotiating process there are still those countries that seek to undermine the process itself for their own short-term gains. I can only say that my Government is saddened by these countries' attitude. For this reason, a Pacific regional expert group has warned that we may have to look at our migration options, rather than adaptation options. Are we willing to see the disappearance of whole countries for the sake of short-term economic gain?

A recent newspaper ad campaign here in the United States has further attempted to add confusion and doubt in regard to the scientific evidence, and is also spreading alarmist doomsday scenarios for the economies of the developed countries. This is simply a misrepresentation of what is being discussed and of what has been proposed, as well as what is likely to be the result if we do not act now. I was further amazed at seeing television ads stating similar misleading information. The question that appears to be raised is that the developed countries will pay a heavy financial price for ineffective measures. The suggestion here is that climate change is a preposterous plot by developing countries to dominate the industrialized economies. But climate change would be costly to us all. The destruction of small island developing States and other low-lying areas will only be the first marker as the flood gates open for full-blown climate change. There should be no misconception that there is any other option except action to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. I wish to state our position, supported by scientists, economists and concerned people, that inaction will result in a disaster for mankind. What we need as the first step are significant, legally binding cuts in the greenhouse gas emissions of the industrialized world.

Please allow me to state our gratitude to and full support for the Secretary-General in his efforts and proposals to reform the United Nations. His report has been studied by our officials, and we have concluded that we must give the Secretary-General our full backing on his vision for a reformed United Nations. I have some experience with the difficulties of bringing reform to an unwilling system, and we understand fully what he is going through. But reform is crucial if we are to have a forward-looking and effective United Nations, a United Nations that can assist us developing countries in our search for sustainable development. All the national efforts of countries like the Marshall Islands require an international support structure that is conducive to sustainable development goals. The United Nations has a crucial and vital role, and we must maintain its leadership and coordination function.

Reform of the United Nations requires that the Member States recommit themselves to their treaty obligations to negotiate in good faith and find the mutually beneficial steps that we need to take. I wish to reiterate the support which my Government has given to the proposals that have come out of the Committee on Contributions as a good starting point for financial reform. Let us take these modest first steps, and then in the next phase we can finish the reform.

Reform will also have to involve the expansion of the Security Council. We have stated our support for various proposals in past general debates, and we have been involved in the working groups. Last week the Prime Minister of Fiji reiterated their proposal to give more prominence to the Pacific as a subregion of the Asian Group. This is an idea that we wholeheartedly embrace. It has captured a very important facet of the reasons why we need to have expansion — that is, to facilitate the participation of all countries in the Security Council. Our countries would feel much more comfortable with the decisions of the Security Council if we had a better opportunity to be a member. There is also a need to review the use and extent of the veto power, and whether there should in fact be any new permanent members of the Security Council. It may well be that a more equitable rotation structure would suffice.

These are some of the most pressing issues before this session of the General Assembly. The connection between what occurs in the international community and the impact the results have on individual countries should be made clearer. The sustainable development process that we wish to work towards requires a great effort on the part of the Marshall Islands Government and citizenry.

Similarly, the international community as a whole must be involved in charting a more democratic and cooperative future in this singular world organization. We feel that we deserve the support of the international community for our own efforts, and we pledge to work constructively with the United Nations system and donor community.

The Acting President: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Liberia, His Excellency Mr. Monie Captan, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Captan (Liberia): I have the honour to present my personal compliments to His Excellency

Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko and to wish him every success during his presidency.

I have the honour also to deliver the address of His Excellency Mr. Charles Ghankay Taylor, President of the Republic of Liberia, who regrettably cannot be here today. The text of his address reads as follows:

"At the outset, I wish to convey sincere greetings, on behalf of the Government and people of Liberia and in my own name. We are here today, having endured and survived a severe civil crisis of nearly a decade, through the acute consciousness of our subregion, whose empathy with Liberia's plight created and orchestrated a mechanism to prevent us from self-destruction. And we stand no less indebted to a sea of humanitarian outreach through the international community, most notably the European Union (EU) and the United States; but absolutely, as a living testimony to God Almighty, whose compassionate will has removed the hand of evil from the activities of our nation.

"Indeed, we are here because Liberia has stood the test of time and the full assault of hardship. Today, one added voice of a sovereign State of Africa — and an original Charter Member of this Organization — is being heard through its constituted Head of Government, which we symbolize, and for which we give all glory to God.

"It is my pleasure to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko on his election to the presidency of this fifty-second session of the General Assembly. To this we add our best wishes for his success in meeting the challenges of this awesome assignment. Also, it is befitting that we extend our thanks to his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Razali Ismail, whose tenure was characterized by a resolute commitment to finding solutions to the many issues which impacted the proceedings of the fifty-first session.

"I wish also to seize this opportunity to commend, on behalf of the Government and people of Liberia, Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Already, he has demonstrated that he understands the problems which afflict Africa, his native continent, and that his leadership is not confined to the accomplishments which he earned as a son of Ghana. Day by day, glimpses of his ability as an effective spokesman for all mankind are being made clearly visible. Permit me to also pay special honour to the former Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, whose sense of purpose and invaluable efforts to strengthen the role of the Organization in the pursuit of international peace and security have brought benefits to mankind. We stand convinced that the patience he exercised and the many initiatives and the personal commitment he injected into the search for peace and understanding during his tenure deserve appropriate commendation by this Organization.

"The establishment of the United Nations over five decades ago marked the beginning of a new era in international relations. The adoption of its Charter, a document of pride and durability, which Liberia helped to formulate, instituted a working system of international cooperation. Thus, nations are resolved to eradicate the scourge of war; to strengthen peace through justice and international law; to respect the equal rights of all nations — large and small; to promote social progress and to protect human rights throughout the world. We wish to reaffirm our avowed faith in the United Nations, and we retain the undiminished hope that this Organization will continue to be a veritable instrument for the good conduct of relations among all nation States. In so asserting our firm commitment to its ideals, we, therefore, rededicate ourselves to its objectives. Indeed, from nearly every perspective, this Organization continues to cater to the common aspirations of the international community. Today, with its increased image as a centre for harmonization, the vision of its Charter Members has expanded across its original spectrum of engagement.

"Accordingly, as one of its visionaries who actively participated in its creation, we felt it propitious that — despite our recent civil conflict and its heart-rending accounts — we be personally represented at this fifty-second session, not only to reaffirm our commitment to multilateralism, but also to explore new ways of transforming our hopes for solidarity into concrete actions for peace and development; not only to make a ceremonial representation, but also to add frankness to the scope of discussions for the improvement of our Organization.

"On 19 July, the eve of the sesquicentennial anniversary of our independence, the people of

Liberia went to the polls and made a forthright decision for a great new beginning for democracy, for representative government within a constitutional order, and for peace and prosperity in the forward march towards the twenty-first century. In that momentous exercise, the Liberian people demonstrated once again, as they had done throughout 150 years of survival, their resilience and unconquerable will to overcome imponderable odds, to keep alive the flame of national independence in Africa.

"Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, at the birth of his nation defined independence as the moment 'when an age ends, and the soul of the nation, long suppressed, finds utterance'.

"Thus, when the tragic events of our national experience in the recent past are viewed within the context of historical inevitability, we can safely say that the elections of 19 July 1997 gave rise to a newly liberated soul of the Liberian nation.

"It is in this light that we see the landslide victory of 19 July 1997 as the final coming together of all of our people in a national embrace of unity to give vibrancy to the liberated national soul. The vote took place during the week of the solemn celebration of the 150-year anniversary of the founding of the nation. It was a vote rooted in renewed hope, which concurs with what one writer refers to as 'idealism suffused with a sense of ending'. The people voted to end civil war and national turbulence and to begin a new era of peace, stability, democracy, responsible government and prosperity.

"We have fully grasped the message of our people's verdict. Upon our inauguration on 2 August 1997, we set out to form a Government of inclusion. We have also embarked on a process of national reconciliation. We have invited all Liberians, irrespective of political party affiliation, religious orientation and ethnic origin, to come and join hands with us in rebuilding our country. We have assured all that our primary objective is to foster national unity as the best hope for genuine peace and progress in our country.

"We have also reaffirmed the 1986 Constitution as the Organic Law of Liberia. That Constitution guarantees and protects the fundamental rights and freedoms of all alike. We are committed to making that sacred document work. Our Administration will guarantee and promote the functioning of a credible and independent judiciary. We shall also protect human rights and freedom of the press. Above all, we shall endeavour to promote internal stability through a Government of inclusion and national unity.

"Our experience as a nation convinces us that the right to self-determination is a necessary prerequisite for any people to ensure national development and to play a meaningful role in the community of nations. The right to self-determination is not, in our view, limited to liberation from external control, but also applies to liberation from internal tyranny. It is being demonstrated time and again that it is unhealthy for external support to be tied to the survival of a particular regime rather than to the growth and development of the nation. There is no substitute for legitimacy and good governance. Internal liberation awakens a new consciousness about peace, security, stability and conflict resolution within a society. The institutions of the market economy are strengthened, and the people develop greater hope for a decent and better standard of living.

"In this connection, and based on our experience, Liberia will continue to play the role of promoting regional peace and security, fostering national development through regional and subregional integration and promoting democratic values through institution-building.

"We are aware of the significant changes which are taking place, including the increased tendency towards political pluralism and democratization, the rise in economic growth in a number of countries and the upsurge towards market economies, as well as progress towards the liberalization and globalization of the world economy.

"The end of the cold war has resulted in a relaxation of tension, particularly between world Powers, and improved interactions among and between States. My Government must nevertheless register its grave concern that since the advent of the historic fiftieth anniversary of this Organization, some regional conflicts which appeared on the verge of resolution have defied settlement. We are deeply disturbed by ongoing conflicts in Africa, the Middle

East, Europe and Asia. Historical evidence has shown that conflicts, whether in Africa or elsewhere, will have negative consequences, not only for the countries directly affected, but also for their neighbours and the regions of which they are a part. Liberians know only too well the consequences of a protracted conflict and therefore urge all parties to the various conflicts to seek a negotiated settlement of their differences.

"In recent times, several unfavourable developments have continued to threaten international peace and security. At present, in the Middle East, the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Authority is permeated with accusations, charges and counter-charges, despite the signing of the Agreement of 28 September 1995. In spite of the fact that efforts to pacify the situation are being undermined, we urge States within the region which are taking concrete steps, as well as the international community, to give more attention to ensuring that the peace process remains on course.

"Within our subregion, while we draw immense satisfaction from the fact that the Liberian crisis has finally ended and the Liberian people have achieved durable peace and stability, we lament the reality of the threatening situation which recently has developed in neighbouring Sierra Leone. This matter truly leaves much to be desired, and we cannot overemphasize the fact that it is in the best interests of Liberia and its neighbours that peace be soon established in Sierra Leone and its people reconciled.

"Liberia, a member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Committee of Five on Sierra Leone, is committed to a peaceful, negotiated settlement of the Sierra Leonean crisis. We are of the firm conviction that it is our responsibility to ensure security and stability within our subregion.

"Notwithstanding the individual and collective efforts of African States to achieve socio-political transformation, acts of destabilization continue to pose a serious threat to these countries. That is why African countries have intensified cooperation at the regional and subregional levels to stem this trend. We welcome the growing cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations in the fulfilment of Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter, and the renewed commitment to conflict resolution through preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping and peace-building.

"In the economic sphere, recent conscientious efforts have resulted in the registration of positive signs in the revitalization of the global economy. This progressive trend has been taking place against the backdrop of explosive growth in world trade and private investment flows. In the meantime, developing countries have thus far contributed 70 per cent of the growth in global gross domestic product and half of the growth in world trade. Notwithstanding this, the gap between developed and developing countries continues to grow, leaving many countries behind amidst the general positive economic progress occurring in the world. More importantly, official development assistance required to fill the gap in resource depletion has fallen to its lowest point in real terms during the past 23 years, thereby forcing many of the world's poorest countries deeply into debt, and making it virtually impossible for them to undertake or sustain economic reforms.

"This situation has affected most developing countries, particularly those in Africa which continue to experience the crippling impact of external debt, deteriorating terms of trade and decline in investment and financial flows. While we acknowledge that the development of the African continent is primarily the responsibility of its people, we hope that Africa's development will, of necessity, remain an area of concern to the international community. We commend the Secretary-General for his continuing initiatives for the development of Africa. The Government of Japan also deserves Africa's appreciation for helping to sensitize the international community to the need to assist African countries to overcome the negative trends which are impacting on their economies.

"Closely related to the issues of development is that of the environment. The human impact on the environment has increased dramatically, with unprecedented effects on mankind. Nevertheless, we remain hopeful that the growing awareness of the degradation of the environment and the need to reverse this trend will remain a priority on the global agenda. In this connection, my Government commends the holding of the recent high-level meeting convened by the United Nations to review progress on the implementation of decisions reached on Agenda 21 since the 1992 Rio Conference on Environment and Development.

"The Government of Liberia is concerned about the alarming incidence of drug trafficking and drug abuse, which have already destroyed and continue to ruin countless lives. While this unfortunate development has undermined the integrity of many Governments, we commend cooperative efforts between Governments that have taken bold action to prevent and eradicate drug trafficking and drug abuse. We welcome the Secretary-General's proposal to merge the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Division and the United Nations International Drug Control Programme.

"The Liberian Government is prepared to work very closely with the international community in order to bring success to the international campaign that strives to undermine the production of and trafficking in illicit drugs. We are assured in this connection that, working in the framework of international cooperation and given our commitment, we are bound to succeed in our efforts to make our world a safer place for ourselves and our children.

"Regarding the restructuring of the Security Council, we must recall that with the founding of this Organization we committed ourselves and succeeding generations to continuously preserve peace and security in our world. Let us remember that peace will be elusive in the world where social, economic and political rights are flouted. In this connection, and in view of the Security Council's primary role in the maintenance of international peace and security, its reform is of particular urgency. We note the emergence during the fifty-first session of the growing consensus to restructure the Council so as to ensure that it becomes more representative and democratic. This would encourage the advent of a greater balance between the requirement of efficiency and that of expansion, as well as transparency in its method of work. Moreover, with optimum utilization of the resources of those Member States that can contribute significantly to peacekeeping operations, immense successes will redound to the credit of this Organization.

"Due to the far-reaching implications for global peace of the Security Council's decisions and actions, there have been persistent demands to expand its membership to reflect geographic balance and ensure equitable representation. Besides, of the fifteen members of the Council, five enjoy the veto power. The right of veto, we believe, is against the principle of universality and leaves the fate of our world to be decided by only a few Members of the United Nations.

"Accordingly, Liberia joins the call for expanded membership of the Security Council. We also request that, as the region with the single largest number of Members, Africa be given two permanent seats on the Council. We further call for the elimination of the veto power.

"Liberia believes that no country or institution can prosper if it is resistant to change — the United Nations being no exception. In this connection, we agree with the Secretary-General's decision to institute reforms in the administrative and operational aspects of the Organization. Notwithstanding this, we support a reform process that does not diminish the capacity of the United Nations to perform the Charter-mandated functions in the area of development, more especially to meet the needs of developing countries. We are, therefore, heartened by the Secretary-General's indication that savings accrued from the exercise will be utilized to establish an economic- and social-development account for the sole purpose of financing development programmes launched by the United Nations. We note that $200 million will be saved for development by the year 2002.

"The issue of sanctions has occupied much time and energy here over the years, and Liberia, like other African nations and nations around the world, has watched sanctions succeed, and fail, as a means of encouraging change. Sanctions' greatest triumph was perhaps in South Africa, where international sanctions isolated the racist apartheid regime and contributed to its eventual downfall.

"But unfortunately, as we know, sanctions are not always so successful. Time and again, nations singled out for punitive sanctions have been able to circumvent the edicts of this world body and obtain the goods or the weapons they seek. Still worse, the leaders of these nations, who are the real targets of the political and economic pressure that sanctions are meant to deliver, often feel no pain. Sadly, it is the innocent people — already the victims of these regimes — who suffer the most. On balance, then, our Government is sceptical about sanctions as a tool for change. Unless they are universally adopted, strictly enforced and carefully designed to

achieve specific political goals, we believe that sanctions can too easily end up harming those they are designed to help.

"The Liberian civil war was to a great extent, a protest against the blatant disregard for and violation of the rights of Liberians. At the end of seven years of civil war, the need to consolidate peace is of the highest priority to my Government. It is essential to national survival and the sustenance of our newly created democracy that the post-war reconciliation policy be firmly grounded in developing a culture and tradition consistent with international norms of respect for basic human rights.

"In furtherance of this objective, my Government has initiated a process to create by law a National Commission on Human Rights that will operate independently and that will investigate, document and report cases of human rights violations. Additionally, the post of Deputy Minister for Human Rights has been created within the Ministry of Justice, with specific responsibility to ensure the protection of basic human rights.

"Since its inauguration on 2 August, our Government has taken prompt and appropriate steps that will protect the rights of all people, whether citizens or aliens, residing in the country. As a testimony to this commitment, some immigration officers were dismissed when they were found guilty of having brutalized some alleged aliens. Additionally, a private lawyer successfully filed a writ of habeas corpus against the Minister of Justice, the Commissioner of Immigration and the Director of Police for detaining a number of aliens for over forty-eight hours without the formal charge required. The lawyer won the case and the aliens were released.

"Without a doubt, we as a Government are aware that we are being keenly observed, as if through a microscope, both internally and externally. Accordingly, we do not intend to water down our promise that matters relating to human rights will be kept clean and our record maintained unadulterated. As a candidate for the presidency, we made it abundantly clear that, when elected, there would be no witch-hunting. On this account, we stand to be challenged.

"We are witnesses to the rapid growth of the global village through advances in technology, communications and tolerance, which, too, have encouraged world peace and stability. Indeed, when the illustrious architects of this noble Organization conceived the idea, from the Dumbarton Oaks Conference to the Yalta Conference, before drawing up the United Nations, the world was not as it is today. From its original membership of 51 nations in 1945, the United Nations now has an impressive membership of 185 nations. Out of this number, 28 have been admitted just since 1990, the latest being Palau, in 1994.

"The parallel existence of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China on either side of the Taiwan Strait constitutes for my country, a founding Member of the Organization, one of the difficulties and the source of the prevalent sense of frustration that continue to persist on the international political scene since the end of the cold war.

"It really begs the issue to review the decision of the General Assembly on 25 October 1971, when its Members voted to admit the People's Republic of China to membership while ignoring a compromise proposal that the Republic of China retain a seat in the General Assembly. My country, a life-long supporter of the principle of including every nation in the United Nations system, feels that there should be a re-examination of the proposal to which I have just referred, with a view to admitting the Republic of China to the General Assembly. Quite clearly, existing global realities make it necessary and prudent for us to review the action taken in 1971. We believe that the United Nations is the proper instrument for the correction of many seemingly intractable problems. We would add that this Organization is the most significant international forum for the resolution of complex crises and that all nations that desire to participate in the United Nations should have that right. Yet, in the highest sense, we believe that until reunification is achieved the parallel participation in the United Nations of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China would be conducive to regional security and world peace.

"One of the principal challenges facing Liberia today is the revitalization of its economy. The past prosperity of the Liberian economy was built on the successful development of the country's abundant natural resources and the active participation of the

private sector. We also enjoyed the benefits of a lively transit trade with our neighbours. During the years of economic mismanagement and civil strife, the economy collapsed and the livelihood of ordinary people was impaired.

"Bringing prosperity back to the country is an enormous challenge. We are determined that the benefits of such prosperity should reach all the people of Liberia, and not merely the privileged few. I am convinced that the private sector has a key role to play. The management of the economy must be transparent and cost effective. The burden of external debt, which we inherited, needs to be addressed. A positive relationship with the international financial institutions is central to the success of our reconstruction programme. We need an early infusion of financial resources on favourable terms to launch the post-war reconstruction programmes.

"Private-sector operations in rubber, timber and mining will provide jobs and earn foreign exchange for the country. We need to create a favourable climate for new investment. This means that the fiscal regime must be reformed and simplified and that taxes be paid to the Government. My Government has already implemented a programme to centralize all revenue collection under the Ministry of Finance. Our exchange rate and currency practices are being reviewed in order to guide local and foreign investors and inform them about the transaction costs of doing business.

"In managing the economy we must make the best use of scarce resources. There is no place in the new Liberia for ineffective public corporations and a bloated civil service that are a drain on the budget. Revenue collection is being tightened up, expenditure strictly controlled, and the budget used as the main vehicle for prudent fiscal management and public accountability. Given our very limited resources, this will mean that many priority projects will have to wait.

"Liberia's external debt to international financial institutions and other external creditors, inherited from previous Governments, imposes a huge burden on my Government. We believe that the size of that burden, coupled with the cost of rebuilding a shattered society, makes it essential that the international community make special concessions.

"My Government intends to manage public finances in accordance with the high standards expected of any good government. But we cannot consolidate the transition from war to peace unless immediate funds are available to run the machinery of government and to start up the reintegration programmes designed by donors, in consultation with our Government.

"I stand here in this great Hall and before honoured representatives of independence as the representative of a nation that only 75 days ago underwent a free, fair and peaceful election — perhaps one of the most transparent elections ever held anywhere in the world. I hail from a national heritage which, more than a century and half ago, was born out of enslavement, servitude and racism and which progressed from thence to freedom and independence, and my proud homeland, in its struggle to maintain its sovereignty and independence, lost almost half of its territory to external Powers. Indeed, I speak of a land of liberty that has passed through more than its share of political crucibles.

"We have come, but not in anger. Rather, we have emerged from a stained past of self-inflicted suffering, which is perhaps not the sures: rationale for qualifying. But our scars enable us to speak, with some constraint, at nearly first hand about how we have been able to survive and keep our dignity as a sovereign State and people. We ask that the Assembly accord us the requisite attention, while retaining the hope that the experience of conflict resolution in Liberia and the engagement of the United Nations and the international community, in collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) through its peacekeeping instrument, the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), which helped restore peace and harmony to Liberia, will enlighten members on future undertakings in the arena of civil conflict.

"In all candour, if there is anything of substance that must be said, it is this: Let us never again allow any form of human anguish to be left in isolation, no matter how meaningless it may appear in the eyes of controlling Powers. Should it not be understood that one human tear is just as painful as another and that the entire globe is united by the same life-generating substance?

"We have come to the United Nations to advocate international cooperation. Let us not close our eyes to the countless failures in the achievement of our common objectives as we enter the twenty-first century. Let us take note of the dangers and work together so that reason can prevail. The economic problems and social dangers the world faces are immense, and we have no right to postpone solutions or open the door to conflict and instability. Strategic confrontation dominated the best minds of this century. Perhaps it is now time to turn our eyes upon ourselves, upon our peoples and our societies, to assess their condition, their moral needs and their crises, and to attempt to find solutions.

"To conclude, I wish to make an appeal to the heart, without distinction as to creed, dogma, political colour or national faction. I should like each of us to look the other in the eye and ask ourselves sincerely and frankly: Is this the world our children deserve? Will we be satisfied when, in the near future, the voice of history and of our blood summons us to judgement? The United Nations system and the entire international community will be judged on the basis of their response to those important questions."

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.